

# Connie Morgan with the Mounted



*By* James B. Hendryx

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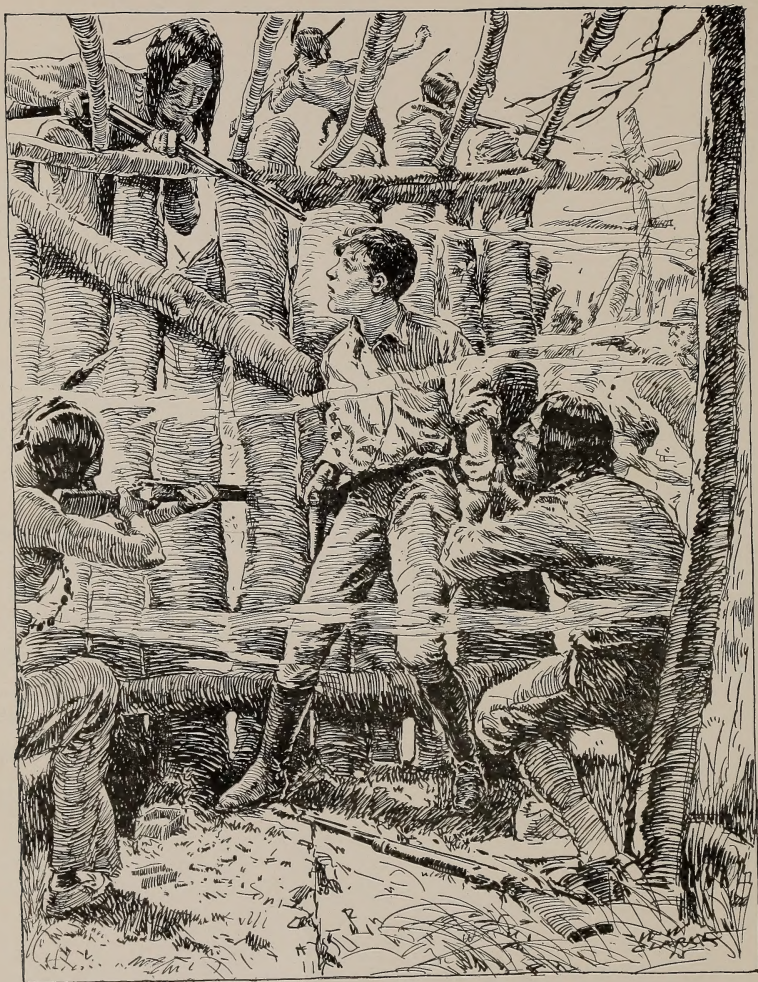
**The Promise**

**Connie Morgan in Alaska**

**Connie Morgan with the Mounted**

**The Gun Brand**





As Ick Far applied a rude tourniquet, Connie glanced up. A face leered over the barricade and the muzzle of an old smooth-bore appeared



# CONNIE MORGAN

WITH

# THE MOUNTED

BY  
**JAMES B. HENDRYX**

AUTHOR OF "CONNIE MORGAN IN ALASKA," "THE PROMISE," ETC.



*ILLUSTRATED*

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**CONNIE MORGAN**  
**WITH THE MOUNTED**



# Connie Morgan with the Mounted

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## CHAPTER I

### WHEN THE ICE WENT OUT

INTO a damp, soggy camp on the left bank of the Yukon near the mouth of Sixty Mile, where fifty rough men awaited the breaking up of the ice, swung a dog team. Now, in the land of the long, lone trails a dog team arouses small comment—but when the team is a ten-team, each dog of which is a superbly muscled, finely poised *malamute*—and when the musher is a small boy with a square-set jaw, who stops the team in its tracks with a single, short, sharp word—the outfit becomes, at once, a thing of much interest. And especially is this true at a time when travel in the Northland, even for

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the toughest and most hardened of trail mushers, is fraught with peril and heart-breaking discomfort.

So it was that the big men crowded about and shouted hearty greetings to the diminutive Jehu. And Connie Morgan, the boy of the dog team, returned the greeting in kind, even as his eyes swept the faces of the encircling crowd.

"Bet a stack o' blues I c'n name him!" cried a voice from the rear of the throng: "He's Sam Morgan's boy, an' take it from me, pards, he's shore some *tillicum!*" The speaker elbowed his way to the forefront and extended a huge, red hand: "Do I win?" he smiled.

"You win," laughed the boy as the man turned toward the others:

"Heer'd 'bout him in Eagle—how he gi'n 'em all the slip an' tuck out arter his pardner—out yonder, beyond the Ogilvies, wher' they say—" The man paused and shuddered: "Well—they's some here that know'd Carlson, an' Carlson wasn't no *chechako*—not what ye c'd notice. That there country got *him*—but this kid, here, he come back—an' not ondly he come back hisself, but he fetched out his pardner, an' another——"

"He beat out th' Ten Bow stampede—I was there, an' I *know*."

"Black Jack Demaree tol' me about him," interrupted a huge man who carried his arm in a sling.

"I know'd Sam Morgan!" exclaimed another, whose beard was shot with grey. "They don't make 'em no better'n Sam. His grave's down by Ragged Falls trail." Other men crowded about, offering their hands, and just when Connie was beginning to fear that his arm would be jerked out by the roots, a loud cry sounded from the direction of the river, and all turned to see a man excitedly gesticulating and pointing upstream where, far out upon the river, a black speck was discernible upon the surface of a drifting ice floe. As a unit the men rushed to the bank which rose sharply from the water's edge. And as they gazed out over the field of grinding ice-cakes, a cry of horror arose from fifty throats:

"It's a *man*!" "Ther's a man out there!" Men rushed up and down the bank in their excitement, shouting useless advice, while others, seizing poles and ropes, dashed out upon an anchored floe whose outer edge extended to the middle of the river.



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The spring "break-up" had come that very morning, and the whole surface of the river was heaving with huge ice-cakes that ground and crushed against each other as they were swept seaward upon the crest of the resistless flood.

"Ye can't do no good that-a-way!" called a man to those who ran out upon the shore floe.

"Nor no other way, neither!" supplemented another. "His cake ain't a-goin' to rub the shore ice, nohow—an' he'll be past 'fore they c'n git there."

"Isn't there *something* we can do?" cried a young man—evidently a *chechako*.

"Not a blame thing!" answered another. "It's tough, pardner, to hev to stand an' see a man carried down ag'in' *that*—but it's got to be." He pointed toward a spot a half-mile below, where, at the head of a white-water rapid, the ice-cakes had formed a huge jam. Cake after cake swept against the barrier, reared high—crunching, grinding, climbing—only to fall back upon other cakes with the roar of a thousand thunders. And it was toward this that the man on the floe was drifting in the middle of the mile-wide river! Men on the bank stared in white-faced fascination,

while others ran frantically about, shouting and waving their caps.

Connie Morgan had rushed to the bank with the crowd. No sound had escaped his lips, and he took in all the details of the situation at a glance. He, too, saw the futility of the efforts of the men who ran out over the surface of the anchored floe.

"They can't make it!" he muttered, and then, suddenly, while some stared and others shouted, the boy reached swiftly for his sheath knife and, turning, dashed straight toward the spot where the ten great *malamutes* stood harnessed. Stooping, he slashed the lashings of his sled-pack and, snatching up a coiled *babiche* line, knotted one end to the trace-line of a near-by toboggan and the other end to the rear of his own sled.

"*Get out of the way! Fall back, there! Gangway! Gangway!*" The voice of the boy cut thin and clear, and as the men sprang aside, Connie cracked his whip, threw himself upon the sled, and the ten great *malamutes* leaped straight for the river. Down the steep bank they plunged and out onto the anchored floe, with the empty toboggan whipping along behind at the end of the sixty-foot line.

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Straight as an arrow toward the outer edge of the floe swept the fastest dog team in all the North. Within a minute they had flashed past the men who ran, while those on the bank gasped as the outfit dashed toward the channel that separated the two floes.

"He'll pile them dogs up in the river!" cried a voice.

"Never I seen such a run!" yelled another. "He'll never turn 'em!" Seconds counted, now. The doomed man caught sight of the dog team and was running along the edge of his floe which was sweeping past at a terrific speed. Fully thirty feet of madly rushing water separated the two great ice-cakes, and the ten flying *malamutes* were approaching this channel with the speed of an express train—another moment and they would be in the water!

Suddenly, almost at the edge, it seemed to the breathless watchers, sounded the sharp, clear word of command. Instantly each dog whirled as on a pivot, slid several yards clawing frantically at the ice, and then swerved sharply to the left. Another short command and they halted as if glued to their tracks, while the empty to-

boggan shot past, missing the sled by a narrow margin. The toboggan with its upturned front seemed hardly to touch the surface of the water as it skimmed, light as a feather, across the channel and leaped onto the ice of the passing floe.

The man on the ice wasted no time. Even before the toboggan came to rest, he had thrown himself face downward upon its flat surface, and the next instant the voice of the boy rang in his ears: "*Mush! Hi! Hi! Go!*" The sled shot back toward the bank, the *babiche* line snapped taut, and with a leap the toboggan with its human freight took the water, sending white spray to the left and to the right. The man felt the shock as the toboggan was jerked onto the shore floe. He raised his head and looked about him. Sixty feet in front a small boy sat upon his sled and cracked a prodigiously long-lashed whip above the heads of the ten big dogs whose feet seemed scarcely to touch the ice as they dashed shoreward with almost incredible speed. Behind him the man saw his floe pass on toward the mighty jam. Upon his ears burst the sound of a great shout and down the steep bank to meet them swarmed fifty



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big, rough men who yelled and danced and flung caps and even mackinaws high into the air. And then, suddenly, from the direction of the jam, came another sound as the big floe struck the barrier. Higher and higher it climbed, tearing, grinding, smashing—until suddenly it broke in two and the upper half crashed backward with the roar of an exploding mountain. The whole jam trembled a moment and then let go, and the next instant the wide Yukon was a mass of tossing, heaving, crunching ice-cakes.

Big Sergeant Dan McKeever, of the Royal North-west Mounted Police, grasped the hand of his small deliverer in a mighty grip:

“It looked like my last patrol, kid—an’ if it hadn’t be’n for you—” The words ceased and the man’s eyes sought the reaches of the river where a broad field of ice-cakes flashed silver in the rays of the noonday sun. The boy laughed.

“Oh, it was the dogs!” he said. “It was lucky I hadn’t unharnessed.”

“Dawgs nawthin’!” exclaimed a man. “Here stud us gillies an’ never even thought of no dawgs—let alone whip-lashin’ that there t’boggan acrost th’ open water!”

And Sergeant McKeever smiled down into the face of the small boy.

"Lucky—eh?" he said. "Well, son, luck's a great thing—when it's handled right." And Connie Morgan wondered why the men of the North laughed.

"Where you headin', kid? An' where's your folks?" asked the Sergeant.

"I haven't got any. I——"

"He's Sam Morgan's boy," volunteered the man with the grizzled beard, "an' Sam—he lays back yonder. He never had no luck—Sam didn't."

"No luck! With a kid like *that!*" The man who knew Black Jack Demaree snorted with disgust, and was interrupted by the officer of the Mounted:

"Sam Morgan!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean big Sam Morgan, that used to prospect through here! The one that followed British Kronk clean through to Candle an'——"

"That's him! I was in Candle when he done it!"

Again the Sergeant turned to the small boy and the gruff voice lowered to softness:

"I know'd your daddy, kid. Folks called him

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unlucky—but, he never *quit*. When his diggin's didn't pan out he'd jest spit on his hands an' sink a new shaft. An' he was never too busy to lend a hand when folks was in trouble. He never made no strike. But here in the North, kid, men will remember Sam Morgan when most of them that's cleaned up their millions will be fergot."

"Ye said a mouthful then, Dan!" spoke Rip Wade, a man with a shirt of multi-coloured checks. "An' now, kid, s'posin' ye tell us where ye're headin'. The jam's busted an' if ye're goin' down river they's room in my scow fer yer outfit. An' you, too, Dan—'less 'en ye'd ruther ride a ice-cake."

"I'm hitting for Dawson," answered Connie. "There is a man—a little weasel-faced man, named Squigg——"

"Squigg!" exclaimed Sergeant McKeever. "So he's showed up again, has he?"

"Do you know him?" asked the boy.

"Know him! You bet your boots, I know him—ordered him out of the territory back in '98. Drifted over into Alaska, somewhere, an' if he had any sense he'd *stayed* there."

"Crossed the river two days ago," volunteered

a man in the crowd, "him an' another one. We tol' 'em they was fools. They was a foot o' water on top o' the ice, an' no one but a fool or a crazy man w'd of tackled it. Said they'd take a chanct, bein' in some consid'ble of a hurry fer to fetch a doc fer a sick pard. We 'lowed they was lyin', but 'tworn't our funeral. They made it, though. We watched 'em acrost."

"What do you want of this here Squigg?" asked the officer.

"Got to beat him to Dawson. He's trying to file a claim that belongs to my pardner and me. I cut across from Ten Bow in hope of crossing the river before the break-up."

"Never mind, kid, we'll beat him to it! He can't make no time without a boat. Of course, he might of got holt of a canoe, but the chances is, he's still this side of Indian River." The officer turned to him of the festive shirt:

"Come on, Rip, throw your stuff in the scow an' the three of us'll nail this here Squigg. I want him for a little job of swindlin' I run foul of up river—didn't place it, then—but I know now it's Squigg—'bout his size."

Rip Wade glanced toward the moving river ice.



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"Jest as you say, Dan," he replied, "but the ice is runnin' pretty strong yet. Tomorrow, mebbe, she'd be cleaned up a bit."

The Sergeant frowned:

"Look here, Rip. Tomorrow might be too late. D'you think I'm goin' to set around an' let that measly cur put anything over on this kid? Come alive, now, an' throw in your stuff, or I'll requisition your boat, an' me an' the kid'll go it alone."

"Aw, can that, Dan. Sure I'll go. How long since you've et?" The man glanced toward the group of tents where smoke ascended from many fires. "Skookum Pete's grub's ready. Go an' divide it between you an' the kid, an' ag'in ye're done the scow'll be loaded."

Twenty minutes later the stout scow was shoved into the current and Rip Wade, expert riverman, took his place in the stern to do the steering, while Connie and Sergeant McKeever, each armed with a light spruce pole, sat well forward and made ready to fend the boat clear of floating ice. Amidships the wolf-dogs curled comfortably among the robes and packs, glad of a respite from the sodden snow-trail.

Rip held the flat-bottomed scow close in, and as the boat felt the grip of the current its speed increased until the rugged shore slipped past in a swift-moving panorama of grandeur. Connie was surprised at the changed aspect of the surface of



“It was a new experience for Connie—this scow travel among floating ice-cakes.”

the river. From the time he had first sighted it until the present moment, the boy had been awed by the mighty sweep of the floating ice-field. Now, however, with the scow rushing down stream the surrounding ice-cakes seemed stationary—floating placidly upon still water, while the shores slipped swiftly past.

It was a new experience for Connie—this scow travel among the floating ice-cakes. And big

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Sergeant McKeever noted with a smile of approval that the small boy at his side asked no questions, but with absorbing interest watched each movement of the skilled steersman as he deftly guided the heavy scow into the channels and water-lanes that opened between the cakes. An hour passed and Connie wondered at the intense vigilance of the riverman, whose sharp eyes never for a moment left the floating ice-cakes. Gradually, a floe several acres in extent worked its way shoreward in the immediate forefront of the scow, leaving in its wake a wide strip of open water comparatively free of floating ice. To the boy's mind this was a situation to be desired, and he watched in surprise as Rip Wade worked like a Trojan to force the scow out among the smaller cakes well to one side of the floating ice-island. For a long half-hour the boy was so busy with his fending pole that he had scant time for observation. And then, suddenly, the thing happened that impressed him as nothing else had, with the value of eternal vigilance. With a dull, grinding, crunching sound the huge floe shuddered and stopped; and the scow, which a moment before had seemed motionless, appeared to shoot forward like a thing of life.

Along the front of the floe appeared a ridge of ice fragments, while from the rear sounded the gurgle of rushing water. Connie glanced backward—the strip of open water was nowhere visible, there was the sound of crashing and rending of ice as cake after cake was hurled by the current against the rear of the grounded floe and dashed into a million flashing fragments. An involuntary shudder shook the small shoulders as the boy realized what would have happened had the man in the stern been unskilled in the ways of the river-trail.

“That’s the reason, kid,” laughed McKeever, who had watched the boy’s evident perplexity. “The scow would have smashed like an egg-shell—we wouldn’t have had a chance in a thousan’.”

As the shadows lengthened, the scow was worked to the opposite bank, and in the long twilight they camped on a high bit of ground well back from the water, a few miles above the mouth of Indian River.

## CHAPTER II

### CONNIE JOINS THE MOUNTED

SUPPER over, Sergeant McKeever and Rip Wade lighted their pipes and the three drew close about the little camp-fire. In the daytime the air was soft with the feel of spring, but the nights were cold and the warmth of the flaring fire was grateful.

The dogs wolfed down their evening meal and, finding the snow frozen to a hard crust into which they could not burrow, returned to the scow to nestle among the canvas-covered packs that littered its floor.

"So you come from over Ten Bow way, kid?" asked the Sergeant.

"Yes, we've got a claim over there—my pardner and I have. He's Waseche Bill—maybe you know him."

"Waseche Bill! Well, I guess I *do* know him! Heard a while back he'd struck it rich over in the



hills. He's a good man—Waseche is. Prospected with him way back before the big stampede. Then he drifted across the boundary an' I joined the Mounted. How is old Waseche, anyhow?"

"He's just the finest man that ever swung a pick!" exclaimed the boy with eyes alight. "But just now he's gone outside."

"Outside! Waseche Bill! What in thunder does he want outside? Why, he's be'n in the big country goin' on fifteen year!"

"It's this way: Waseche busted his leg last winter and it didn't knit right. The doc down at the fort told him if he didn't have it 'tended to right away he'd be lame all his life. He gave him the name of some great surgeon in the States. Waseche didn't want to go—but I made him."

McKeever grinned: "How long is he goin' to be gone? An' what will you do in the meantime?"

"About a year, the doc said—maybe more. I'll just wait around. He wanted me to go, too. But, someway, I'd rather stay in the North. You see, my dad, he loved the North—and—well, it seems like everyone up here was his friend, and I—I kind of feel *at home*."

The Sergeant laid a big hand on the boy's

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shoulder. "Yes, son," he said. "Your dad had plenty of friends in the North. There's many a man's a better man for knowin' Sam Morgan. He never made no big *hurrah*, Sam didn't. Jest went ahead an' done the thing he thought ort to be done—an' he smiled when he done it."

"Ye said a mouthful then, Sarg," acquiesced Rip Wade. "Me—I *know*!"

"An' when we head off this here Squigg, you're goin' back to Ten Bow?" asked McKeever.

"Why, yes—I suppose so. It will be awful lonesome without Waseche, but——"

"It sure will!" interrupted the officer. "Why not join the Mounted?"

"Join the Mounted!" exclaimed the boy. "Why, I'm too young, and too little."

"Wait a bit! 'Course, you couldn't 'list regular—that's a five-year job, an' you are too young. But there's Special Constables, an' they're appointed. I'll speak to the Superintendent, onct we get to Dawson. You might be young—an' little, too—but, By Thunder! The Mounted needs 'em like you! Brains an' nerve is worth more than beef in the service. That hair-trigger stunt you pulled up river this mornin' meant

jest the difference between life an' death to me—an' Dan McKeever ain't the one to ferget it! An' a kid that can set tight an' jam down through twenty miles of floatin' ice, with his eyes open an' his mouth shut—he's good enough for *us*. You're alone, now—till Waseche gets back—an', in the Service you'll get a whole lot of experience that's worth havin', an' you'll see a lot of country that's worth seein', an' you'll be in with a good bunch of boys—if I do say it myself. We ain't no Holy Moseses, us men of the Mounted—but we *run straight*! You ain't got no folks on the outside. Your dad loved the North, an' you love it. Here's a chanct to *know* the North. You ain't no *chechako*—no tin horn. This is your country—an' whether it's in the Yukon, or over acrost the boundary, sometime the North'll need you." The officer stopped abruptly. It was a long speech for Dan McKeever, who was a man not much given to words. Beyond the fire Rip Wade slowly nodded.

"He spoke a mouthful, kid," he said, "Me—I *know*." And the boy believed that Rip Wade *did* know. A small, strong hand extended toward Sergeant McKeever.

"Shake," the boy said, "I'm with you." And

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the big man shook, and so did Rip Wade. And the three crawled between their blankets and slept.

"Hey! Wake up! Wake up, Dan! The scow's gone!" Rip Wade rushed up from the bank of the river to the little camp where he had already kindled the fire. At the first sound of the voice, Sergeant McKeever and Connie Morgan threw back their blankets and fumbled at their boots.

"Gone?" asked McKeever, gazing sleepily toward the river. "What do you mean, 'gone'?"

"Why, *gone*! Stole! Wha'd'ye think I mean?"

The two followed Wade to the river and stared at the spot where, the previous evening, they had drawn the scow up on the bank and secured it to a snaggy tree-stub.

"Squigg," grunted McKeever. "He cert'nly had his nerve! Ain't be'n gone so long, neither," he added, as he stooped to examine the tracks at the water's edge. "He sure has put us in a hole, but—come on, le's eat."

"Ye don't seem to be in no great hurry," grumbled Rip. Sergeant McKeever grinned.

"The Dawson trail ain't so far back," he

answered, "an' the telegraph line—an' here's a little trick that'll send word faster'n what he c'n travel." The Sergeant fumbled in his pack and drew forth a small brass instrument about which were carefully coiled two lengths of insulated wire. It was a lineman's "test set." "They'll be a Constable waitin' for Squigg an' his pardner at Dawson," he grinned.

Twenty minutes later they proceeded to the trail and Sergeant McKeever climbed a pole and made the connection. He slid to the ground and opened his key—the result was the dull click of a dead wire. The Sergeant whistled. "Wire's cut," he growled, after another attempt. "He's a slick one!" And, indeed, the full extent of Squigg's "slickness" was soon manifest, for he had cut the wires where the telegraph line crosses Indian River, and the loose ends trailed in the swollen torrent beyond any hope of recovery. With a deep scowl, McKeever headed toward the Yukon and at the mouth of Indian River came to a small shack built close against the bank. A tousle-headed half-breed threw open the door in answer to McKeever's peremptory knock, and blinked stupidly at his visitors.

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"Come alive, Pierre! Where's your boat?" The Sergeant spoke sharply, and the half-breed stepped from the filthy interior.

"She bre'k oop. I got no boat."

"No boat! Not even a canoe?"

"Canoe! *Oui*, canoe no good. She too mooch ice."

"Never mind the ice—that's our lookout! Show us where the canoe is, and hustle some paddles out here! Quick, now—or off comes your hind legs!"

The man led the way to a *cache* where the canoe had lain throughout the winter, protected from the weather by a clever thatching of spruce boughs.

"She too mooch leak," opined the half-breed, "I got no pitch."

"Fetch a pail, then!" called McKeever, as the man returned to the shack for the paddles.

"Here, kid, you bail!" The Sergeant tossed Connie the pail. "We'll show that shrimp he can't slip anything over on us—if we have to *swim* for it!"

They had proceeded but a short distance down stream when it became plainly evident that the



half-breed knew whereof he spoke when he said: "She too mooch leak." Water seeped, and trickled, and spurted through the seams and cracks of the old canoe and, while the two men toiled at the paddles, Connie bailed for dear life.

The situation the three faced was anything but enviable. Between them and Dawson raged thirty miles of swirling, ice-choked flood. Their canoe was leaking like a sieve and each moment jagged ice-cakes threatened to rip away sides or bottom.

"They didn't have no great start," cheered McKeever, "an' we're travellin' a heap faster'n what they are with that heavy scow. If we can only stay afloat we'll catch 'em sure—an' when we *do*, Squigg'll wisht he never *seen* the Yukon!"

"Ye spoke a mouthful, Dan!" vociferated Rip Wade, as his eyes eagerly sought the river ahead.

Despite the utmost efforts of the men, ice-cakes occasionally rasped the sides of the rotten canoe, until at the end of an hour, although Connie redoubled his efforts, the water gained so fast that Sergeant McKeever was forced frequently to abandon his paddle and bail with his cap. To add

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to the peril of their position, a stiff breeze sprang up from the west, which caught them broadside and forced the floating ice to their side of the river. Waves broke over the gunwale of the loggy craft and the thickening ice-field seriously hampered its movement. It was high noon when the canoe rounded a rocky point which gave the toilers a glimpse of the low wooden buildings of Dawson—and a view, also, of a scow manned by two men, which laboured with the ice, scarcely a quarter of a mile away. The exclamations of satisfaction that sprang to the lips of the pursuers gave place to growls of disappointment as they noted the floating ice which had been driven by the wind into an almost solid pack, cutting them off from their quarry. True, the whole mass was drifting toward Dawson, but owing to the wind, which drove the pack against the bank, its progress was slow—so slow that McKeever estimated that Squigg and his confederate would be able to effect a landing fully a half-hour before the canoe could possibly reach the town.

“They see us!” cried Connie. “Maybe, now, they won’t dare stop to file the claim.”

“They’ll stop, all right,” growled McKeever.

"But they stole the scow. They know they'll be arrested as soon as we land!"

"Sure they do. They won't even try to dodge it. They'll be convicted, too. But, if the claim's any good, what's six months, or a year?"

"But think of having to go to *jail*!"

"That don't worry them kind—they're reg'lar crooks. They figger on doin' time every now in so often—charge it up to profit an' loss, like a storekeeper."

Rip Wade, who had been intently watching the efforts of the men in the scow, turned explosively toward Sergeant Dan:

"Why in blazes don't ye pot 'em? Can't ye see they're a-goin' to beat us to it?"

"In the Service we don't shoot first," answered the officer, "an' we don't shoot at all—if there's any other way."

"Well, they hain't no other way, here—an' I hain't in the Service!" The man dropped his paddle and jerked a heavy revolver from its holster. "Ef I c'n wing one of 'em they can't make no landin'."

"*Rip!*" The single word—low spoken—yet with a peculiar hardness of tone, caused the

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man in the bow and the boy to glance swiftly into the officer's face. They noted a slight narrowing of grey eyes and a perceptible hardening of the muscles of the jaw.

"*Drop that gun!*" The words sounded in the same quiet tone, yet in them was something of deadly import—the voice was the voice of *authority*. And, without a word, the man of the North returned the gun to its holster and picked up his paddle.

They redoubled their efforts, but try as they would, they found it impossible to gain on the scow which the men were already poling in toward the landing. It was plainly evident that unless something happened, and happened soon, Mr. Squigg would file his claim.

Suddenly Connie ceased bailing and gazed intently toward the scow. He jerked the sodden mitten from his hand, raised his fingers to his lips, and a loud, peculiar whistle shrilled across the ice-field. Seconds passed and then, amidships of the scow, heads appeared—tawny, grizzled heads, with long, sharp muzzles, and sharp ears cocked to catch the sound. Again the whistle sounded across the bobbing cakes and the commotion in the

scow increased. Hairy forefeet appeared upon the gunwale of the scow and broad-chested bodies reared high as the great *malamutes* looked eagerly toward the black canoe from whence came the familiar whistle-sound. Loud, excited cries reached the ears of the pursuers as the men endeavoured to quiet the excited dogs, whose concerted rush to the side threatened momentarily to upset the scow. But the wolf-dogs paid no heed, and as the sound of the whistle again broke upon his ears, the huge leader threw back his head and gave voice to a long ululation—half wolf-cry, half dog—and instantly the cry was taken up by others of the pack, and the sound of the shouting voices was drowned.

Then it was that Squigg, himself, precipitated the disaster that made for his own undoing. Raising his spruce pole, he brought it crashing down upon the head of the howling leader—and the next moment the scow was filled with leaping, whirling bodies, and a pandemonium of growls and yelps, and frightened man-cries reached the ears of the three canoemen. The battle was short and decisive. Suddenly, with a wild yell, a man plunged overboard, and as the dogs, with one

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accord, surged toward the remaining man, he, too, stood not upon the order of his going, but leaped far out into the icy waters to escape the death of the flashing fangs. A few moments later, two dripping black objects crawled painfully onto a huge cake of drifting ice which swept on past the Dawson landing.

The rotten bark canoe was forced shoreward and three very stiff and very weary travellers stepped out upon firm ground, and as they stretched their aching muscles they glanced down the river where, a half-mile away, floated a scow full of angry *malamutes*, and two dejected-looking figures upon a cake of ice.

Connie Morgan and big Sergeant Dan McKeever turned from the recorder's office and proceeded to the headquarters of B Division of the Royal North-west Mounted Police. In a terse, one-hundred word epic, Sergeant McKeever turned in the report of his long patrol. Ten minutes later, a swift motor-boat manned by two constables of the Mounted, swept out into the river and headed down stream, while Sergeant McKeever sought an interview with the Superintendent.

As the Sergeant advanced with military preci-





"A few moments later two dripping figures crawled painfully out upon a huge cake of ice."

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sion and saluted, the grey-haired official glanced inquiringly into the face of the small boy who stood erect and trim by the Sergeant's side and returned his glance with an expression of frank interest.

"A prisoner, Sergeant?" questioned the Superintendent, with a smile.

"No, sir—a recruit." And as the expression of surprise upon his superior's face was followed by a nod, which meant. "Go ahead and explain," the officer told the story of his rescue from the river, and of the events that followed. Much more, he told, also—and when he had finished, the Superintendent tugged thoughtfully at his dark moustache.

"So you want to join the Service, son?" he asked, in a kindly tone.

"Yes, sir."

"Well—it is a bit irregular, but Sergeant McKeever has vouched for you, and—you will do—you see, I knew Sam Morgan."

Thus was Connie Morgan's name entered upon the roster of the Mounted and he became Special Constable Morgan, Reg. No. 4524, B Div., Dawson. And as he accompanied his new-found friend to-

ward the barracks, they met the special detail of Constables who were proceeding toward the jail, escorting between them two shivering prisoners—there was a rush of great tawny bodies, and the boy was nearly knocked from his feet as the ten huge *malamutes* leaped and crowded about their young master.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CANOE ON THE YUKON

WITH the opening of the Yukon, the men of B Division, Royal North-west Mounted Police, threw themselves into the work of checking up boats from above, and rendering assistance or relief to the many who had ventured into the land of gold, ignorant and ill-equipped for their battle with the raw. Up and down the river from Dawson the police flag waved above tiny far-flung outpost stations where one or two of the guardians of the wilds stood ready at a moment's notice to rip a man from the jaws of ungentle death, or maintain the order that has made the vast Canadian North-west conspicuous as the only great frontier the world has ever seen upon which respect for law is the rule rather than the exception.

"Boat ahead!" cried Special Constable Connie Morgan, as the fast little speed boat *Aurora* chugged around a bold headland of the great

river's East bank. The boy held a pair of binoculars upon a tiny brown speck which floated afar out upon the surface of the river.

"What is she?" asked Sergeant McKeever, who, with an ear for the exhaust, was "tuning up" his new engine.

"Looks like a canoe. She's in trouble. Drifting sideways, now. Busted paddle, I guess. No, I believe she's empty." Connie jerked out his observations, as he held the binoculars upon the rapidly approaching craft.

"Guess you're right," assented McKeever, as he scrutinized the canoe which swung aimlessly about in the current. "We'll just slip a line on her an' tow her ashore." He twisted the wheel a trifle and the *Aurora*, exhaust sputtering like a gattling gun, swept in a wide curve toward the floating canoe.

"There's someone in her!" exclaimed Connie. "Look! He's hurt—or something—all doubled up in the bottom!"

McKeever cut off his power and the speed boat glided alongside. As Connie had observed, there was a man in the canoe. The man was an Indian. He was dead.

Grasping the gunwale of the lighter craft, the two

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held it close against the side of the motor boat, the trained eyes of the older man taking in at a glance every detail of their find. His brows drew together in a frown and he gave a low whistle.

"Somethin' queer, here, kid. We ain't the first that's found him! Come on, let's get him ashore."

Connie made a light line fast to the bow of the canoe, McKeever started his engine, and the *Aurora* chugged slowly toward the bank, dragging the canoe in her wake.

A worn blanket in which were rolled a small can of tea, a corked "pain killer" bottle containing a few sulphur matches, an old velvet "moss bag" in which were some shreds of pemmican, a small bottle of black rifle powder, and a filthy rag in which were wrapped a few lead slugs, constituted the Indian's trail pack. The officers removed the body and laid it upon the worn blanket, and Sergeant McKeever turned to the boy:

"What do you make of it, son? Look sharp. You're a member of the Force, now, an' it's up to you to use your brains."

"It's smallpox," ventured Connie, with an involuntary shudder.



"No, it ain't!" contradicted the officer, gruffly. The boy looked puzzled. "Go, on," growled the older man.

"Well—he came a long distance——"

"How do you figger that out?"

"Why, his grub is all gone, and——"

"Mightn't of had none to start with. Go on."

Connie was rapidly losing his confidence. He glanced uncertainly into the face of his companion, who was scowling at the still form on the blanket.

"Go on. What else?" urged the Sergeant

"He was nearly starved——"

"Might of be'n a skinny Injun to start with. Go on." So thick and fast came the objections that Connie was completely crestfallen.

"That's about all I can see—and I guess that's mostly wrong. What do you make of it?"

Dan McKeever grinned: "You're all right, kid—far as you go. But you don't go far enough."

"You said it wasn't smallpox," interrupted the boy.

"Take another look. Look careful." The man pointed to the mottled and festered face of the dead Indian. "Does that look like small-

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pox?" Connie looked again and turned a puzzled face toward the big officer.

"Yes," he answered, "it does, but——"

"There ain't no 'buts' about it. Look-a-here, kid. You're a-gettin' your first lesson in police work. It's a business that calls on a man for all the power of observation he's got, because, most always, up here in the North, there ain't no witnesses to what's goin' on, an' a man's got to depend on the sign. But observation ain't all. You've got to be sure of yourself. It don't do a man no good to be right if he don't *know* he's right. If a man's right an' don't *know* he's right, he might better be wrong—see? Now, take our friend, here. You say: 'It's smallpox.' I say: 'No, it ain't.' An' you believed me, an' let it go at that."

The big officer smote his palm with a mighty fist. "When you seen that there blotched-up face *you know'd doggone well it was smallpox!* Now, why didn't you stick to it? When you know a thing, stick to it, no matter who tells you contrary; me, or the Commissioner, or the Governor-General, or the King, hisself—it doesn't make no difference what we think about it. Just you say to yourself:

'All right, you poor simps—think it ain't smallpox, if you want to. But—me, I'm Connie Morgan, Regimental Number 4524, R. N. W. M. P. I'm paid to be right—an' *I am right!* If you want to think this here defunk Injun is a nice ol' lady that died in her bed of the pip—go to it! But, bein' as this here is *my* case, I'll work it out on the idee that he's a starvin' Injun that's travelled a long distance, an' has died of smallpox! 'Cause you was right in all your guesses—far as you went. Do you get me?"

"Sure, Dan, I see, now," smiled the boy. "And I'll not forget it, either. But you said I didn't go far enough. What else do you see?"

Sergeant Dan looked thoughtful: "I see enough to tell me that you an' me has stumbled onto some real work. An' it'll be work that'll take us many a mile back from the big river. This here specimen is from beyond the mountains—he's got deer-skin moccasins an' a carcajo cap, an' they ain't neither deer nor carcajo in the land of the Rats an' North Yukons. Besides that, he's packin' an H. B. blanket, an' H. B. tea, an' H. B. powder, so he must trade on the Mackenzie, or to the southward—an' it's the Mackenzie, 'cause he

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come down the McQuesten—see that yaller mud? That's McQuesten River mud, an' the McQuesten comes out of the north-east. He ain't wintered none too good an' for some reason he's come acrost to the Yukon, 'stead of tradin' where he used to. They must of be'n two of 'em——”

“How do you know?” interrupted Connie, who had followed every word.

“‘Cause no Injun never died of smallpox in no canoe—they'd of died on shore—which he done an' was put in the canoe. Didn't you see how he was layin'? An' look there where his hide come against them canoe ribs. If he'd of died there, he'd of be'n warm when he died an' them ribs would of be'n dented way into his flesh—but they ain't. He was cold when he was put in. His flesh had set, an' you can't hardly see the marks of the canoe ribs. Likewise, no canoe couldn't of come down them white-water rivers without they was a good man at the paddle. An' this other must of be'n an Injun, too, 'cause no white man would turn a canoe-load of smallpox loose to pestelize the whole country.”

“What's this!” exclaimed Connie, as he drew from the moss bag a tightly rolled cylinder of

paper that had been overlooked in the first inspection. It was a page from a police note-book and upon it were scribbled the words:

Hustle vaccination points up here quick. 100 Indians, smallpox—very bad. The Indians will bring you back, but if anything happens, follow up McQuesten to creek marked by blasted pine. Cross divide at head of creek and follow down first creek s. e.

J. RICKEY, *Corporal*, R. N. W. M. P.

Over and over the Sergeant read the note, and as he read, his brows drew together in a frown. Suddenly he looked up:

"I've got it, kid! Rickey run onto this band that was down with the Red Death, an' he stayed with 'em an' sent a couple of bucks for help. They come down with it on the trail. One dies, an' the other put him in the canoe an' come on to the big river, where he either died or else hit back for the Injun camp."

The two officers placed the body and effects in the speed boat and, towing the canoe behind, headed the *Aurora* for Dawson.

Early the following morning Connie Morgan and Sergeant McKeever, together with Ick Far, Indian scout, interpreter, and guide, stepped into

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the *Aurora* and sent her roaring full speed for the mouth of Stewart River. Here the *Aurora* was abandoned and the ascent of the Stewart begun in a canoe. The ensuing five days were days of bone-racking toil, now paddling against the swift current, now poling, and again packing the outfit around a foaming, rock-ribbed rapid, or tugging waist-deep at the tracking line. They arrived, however, without mishap and, halting at the small outpost police station only long enough to replenish the outfit, tackled the smaller and swifter McQuesten.

The nights were short, now, the days long and warm, and from river-bed to timber-line, the Northland was gay with colour. For there is no spring here. As at the touch of a magician's wand, summer leaps from winter's boreal embrace, full fledged in her wild riot of glory. Wild-flowers bloomed everywhere in profusion, showing against the light green of the lower levels in great patches of white and purple and scarlet; while above, the dark, almost sombre green of the spruce and fir stood out sharply against the everlasting snows of the naked peaks that flashed and gleamed their blue and coral lights from a million ice-facets





"In all the North there was no tracker like Ick Far."

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in cold defiance of the brighter, more intense colours of the wild gardens of the valleys.

The ascent of the McQuesten was laboriously slow. Day after day the three indomitable officers pushed into the wild, and each day their progress became more difficult. Rapid succeeded rapid with discouraging frequency necessitating innumerable portages, while the steep, stony banks of the diminishing river gave scant foothold for work at the tracking line. But each day the three laboured from daylight to dark, with faces and hands swollen and red from the sting of the mosquitoes that whined about them in countless millions. Unprotesting they toiled, as became sourdoughs, indulging at rare intervals in a rough-growled word of encouragement or approbation.

On the morning of the tenth day, they halted at the mouth of a small creek that bore in from the south-east. High above them, upon a rocky crag, separated far from its kind, like some gaunt, battle-scarred sentinel of the unknown, stood a gnarled, storm-riven banksian tree.

"Look!" cried Connie. "The creek of the blasted pine!"

Ick Far was sent on a scouting expedition and shortly returned with the information that the back trail of the two Indians led up the smaller confluent. He was an odd bit of humanity—was Ick Far. A finished product of the lean, lone land of cold. In all the North was no tracker like him. His skill amounted almost to instinct, for he could tell at a glance, by signs invisible to the eyes of white men, not only that a man or an animal had passed, but its kind, the time of its passing, and its rate of speed.

Dour and haughty and silent, he had stepped one day out of a furious blizzard into a police outpost on Teslin. And dour and haughty and silent he had remained, although for five years he had eaten the salt of the king. They asked him where he came from and he answered "far," and where he was going, and again he answered "far." And that one word sums up the entire known biography of the leathern-skinned scout. "Ichabod," someone named him, and down on the roster he went: "Ichabod Far, Indian, tribe unknown. Guide, interpreter, scout." Not even in his speech did he reveal a clue to his identity, for twenty dialects of the North were his, and the

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men of twenty tribes welcomed him as friend, but knew not of his origin. For, beneath the morose, forbidding exterior, men knew that the heart of Ick Far was good, and upon more than one occasion he had faced death that others might live.

So, when Ick Far reported, the canoe and a considerable portion of the grub was *cached* and the three struck out on foot. The small creek was hardly more than a succession of shallow rapids and tiny cascades, by means of which the waste from the melting snows of the higher levels rushed and plunged toward the river.

"If it wasn't for the trail leadin' up this creek, I'd sure never look for no pass yonder," announced McKeever, pointing to the fore, where a sea of snow-capped peaks were jumbled in titanic confusion. "You're sure about that trail, Ick?"

The Indian regarded the officer with a pitying expression and, without a word, pointed to the ground at his feet. But although both Connie and the Sergeant stared with all their might, it looked not one whit different from the ground a yard, or a rod to the left, or to the right.

"Oh, sure—clear as mud!" laughed the Sergeant. "All right, Ick, old hand, go to it. But jest the

same, them Injuns ain't mussed up the scenery none scand'lus with their road buildin'."

The tiny valley narrowed and the way became steeper and rougher. Sodden snow lay in sheltered nooks and gashes, through which the three were forced to wallow to the thighs. The air grew perceptibly colder and, except for stunted ever-green growths, vegetation disappeared.

It was well toward evening when a sudden turn of the narrow ravine revealed sight of the divide; or pass—a jagged notch that cut clean and sharp upon the dimming sky line. Ick Far crept ahead to reconnoitre, while Connie and McKeever snatched a moment's rest.

"Some pass, kid. What ails old Gay an' Festive?" Even as the Sergeant spoke, Ick Far's rifle barked sharply. A second or two of silence, and it barked again—and this time there was no silence! From the scrub in front, and a little to the right of the narrow, rock-, and ice-strewn trail, came a quick, surprised grunt, followed by a roar of mingled pain and rage that rolled and reverberated through the narrow valley.

The next moment, with a scattering of loose stones and a crashing of scrub trees, the form of a

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giant "bald face" grizzly loomed almost upon the two officers. There was no time for thought. Quick as a flash, Connie threw himself between two rocks and, as the great brute thundered past, the boy saw McKeever slip on a patch of old ice, try to recover, and then, as though hurled from a catapult, ricochet from a rock-wall to bring up against a small twisted sapling, and drop, limp as a rag at its base. From beyond, down the steep valley, a mighty roaring and a rattling avalanche of small stones marked the flight of the wounded bear.

Connie leaped to his feet and rushed to the side of the Sergeant, where he was joined a few moments later by the Indian scout whose ill-timed shot had precipitated the disaster. Together they moved the unconscious man to a flat shelf of rock and proceeded to examine him for injuries. Upon his forehead, above the left eye, a lump the size of a hen's egg had swelled to an angry blue-black, but this gave them scarcely a thought, for they saw that from the thigh to the top of his high-laced boot, the man's khaki trousers hung in ribbons where the huge claws had ripped downward almost the entire length of the leg. For



a moment the boy gazed at the widening stain that reddened the tattered undergarment, and then, working swiftly with his sheath knife, he bared the injured leg and saw that his worst fears were realized. At the lower termination of the scars the leg was broken where the weight of the twelve-hundred-pound monster had rested for a moment in his wild stampede. Thanks to the strong cloth of the Service trousers and the thickness of the undergarment, the gashes were not deep, and after a careful bathing with ice-water the flow of blood was staunched and the wounds bound up.

With the aid of Ick Far, a *babiche* line, and a small sapling for a lever, Connie at length succeeded in setting the bones and soon had the satisfaction of seeing the injured member bound tightly in splints. As the last bandage was drawn into place, McKeever opened his eyes and stared foolishly about.

"What—happened?" he asked, weakly.

"Oh, nothing—much," grinned Connie. "A wounded grizzly wanted to rampse over the spot where you were standing—and he rampsed."

"I saw him—comin'," muttered the Sergeant,

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with a bewildered glance at his leg. "An' the next thing I remembered the whole mountain jumped sideways an'—" He pointed toward the bandages. "Busted?" he asked. Connie nodded.

Followed a long silence, and again the Sergeant spoke: "Guess I won't be able to mush on over the pass. You an' Ick, here, take the points to Rickey. Pack me up some grub from the canoe, an' I'll camp here till you get back."

"Not on your life, Dan! Listen to me," objected Connie. "I've had time to figure it out. I'll take the points to Rickey, and Ick will——"

"No you don't! Remember, kid, I'm in command of this patrol——"

"You're incapacitated!" fired the boy, "and that leaves me in command. You can't stay alone in the shape you're in. Suppose——"

"All right, kid," grinned McKeever, "we'll split the difference. You stay with me, an' Ick can go on with the points. He'll get 'em there quicker'n what you would; an' then him an' Rickey can pick us up on the way out."

Connie shook his head: "Now, listen, Dan. It's like this: your leg is broken—and broken bad.

The quicker you get to a doctor, the better. Ick knows the river and he can get you to McQuesten in two days, and down the Stewart in two more. What would happen if I tried to take a canoe down through those rapids? You know, and so do I. If Ick goes on, we've got to wait. Suppose he misses Rickey, or things don't go right beyond the divide? Suppose your leg doesn't get along right? We're still waiting—and we're not long on grub.

"There's the divide—I can't miss it. Ick and I will pack you down to the river, and I'll mush on with the points."

"You're so good at supposin': supposin' you don't find no Injuns? Supposin' somethin's happened to Rickey?"

"Well, I can come back, can't I? I'm no *chechako*! When you hit the Yukon, you can send Ick back. Anyhow, if things don't go right, it will only be me—and Rickey, maybe. But if I stay with you and anything should go wrong with Ick, we wouldn't any of us get out."

Sergeant McKeever saw the truth of the boy's words and at length gave a grudging assent:

"All right. You ain't no *chechako*. You'll

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make it. Roll in, now, 'cause we got a hard job ahead."

The task of transporting the injured Sergeant down the steep, rough trail to the river was indeed "a hard job," consuming the better part of two days—days of muscle-straining labour for Connie and Ick Far, and of excruciating agony for McKeever, whose injured leg protested with a wrench of fierce pain at each jolt or unavoidable bumping of the rude blanket and pole litter. But not a groan, nor a word of protest escaped him, and always he greeted the anxious looks of his bearers with encouraging, if often white-lipped, smiles. At last the river was reached and McKeever made comfortable upon his blankets in the bottom of the canoe. Ick Far took his place and, with paddle resting against the bank, looked at Connie.

"Dem Yella Knife," he grunted, "y'u watch 'em good. Too mooch medicine man. Som' tam' good Injun—som' tam' ver' bad."

"So long, kid," called McKeever, waving his hand, "you'll go through a-whoopin'. One policeman is worth a whole band of Injuns—an' they know it. Let 'em see *you* know it, too. Handle 'em like you owned 'em—an' if anything goes

wrong, jest you remember that the Mounted will comb Canada for the last crawlin' varmint of 'em!"

Ick Far shoved off, and Connie watched the canoe shoot out into the current under the short, powerful strokes of the Indian's paddle.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE HAND OF THE RED DEATH

ON the evening of the third day after his parting with Ick Far and McKeever on the bank of the McQuesten, Connie Morgan inched his way through a thick growth of aspens that fringed a narrow beaver meadow from whence floated the sounds of an Indian village. For an hour he had proceeded cautiously, guided by the sounds, and now, crawling stealthily through the bush, he could see the twinkling lights of many camp-fires. Husky dogs howled in concert, babies cried, and from one of the dark, conical tepees came the monotonous sound of a drum. The boy edged nearer. Forsaking the friendly shelter of the aspen copse for the high lush grass of the open ground, he wriggled snakewise toward the dark shadow of a tepee fifty yards distant.

Behind him the thicket loomed black with its promise of concealment, and in front, fires flared,



dogs barked and howled, and now and then the boy caught scraps of hoarse guttural, as blanketed forms moved in and out among the fires.

Connie had seen Indian villages before—had eaten and slept in them, but some way, this camp seemed different. An indefinable something, like an all-pervading spirit of doom, seemed to hover over the village and include the entire valley in its miasmal embrace. Even the mute figures of the squaws humped about the fires spoke absolute dejection and helpless apathy toward the inevitable. Unconsciously Connie shuddered, and little tickley chills crawled up and down his spine. As if to add to the depression and intensify the portent of evil, a weird wraith-like fog, grey and chill and clammy, crept up the valley and settled upon the village of tepees. Again Connie shuddered and drew closer, as the humped figures blurred beside the fires where the flames burned a sickly yellow and glowed weak and hazy through the chill fog-mist.

Suddenly the incessant pom, pom, pom of the drum was stilled, a fire larger than the rest glowed out, and blanketed forms in groups, and twos, and threes emerged from tepees and moved silently

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toward it. The squaws retired to the outer fires and Connie watched the fog-wraith eddy and swirl in their wake and settle heavily, like molasses poured from a jug.

Creeping cautiously from tepee to tepee, the boy worked his way toward the big fire. Now on hands and knees, now flattened into the trampled grass, as a dark form stalked past within reach of his hand. The fire blazed sullenly before the door of a tepee, the sides of which were thickly hung with caribou hides fantastically painted with ochre of dark red and saffron. Connie flattened himself close against the base of this tepee and watched the stolid, imperturbable faces of the Indians who squatted in a circle about the fire. "A council," he muttered, "I wonder where Rickey is?"

Suddenly, from the interior of the tepee close at his ear, sounded the beating of the drum, and a moment later a strange figure leaped into the circle of the firelight—a figure gaunt and fierce-eyed, and naked save for a gee-string, and several long necklaces of claws and teeth, and the dried bodies of birds. For fully a minute the figure stood motionless—rigid—gazing far into the fog as if to

penetrate the secret of its thick, clammy silence. Then, wailing forth the words of a weird chant, he began slowly to dance, lifting each bare foot in turn and bringing it down with a peculiar thud. Faster came the words of the chant, and faster thudded the feet upon the ground, while the man's long black hair switched about the grease-glistening shoulders like a black banner of death. The words of the chant died down, the dancing ceased and, with a weird and solitary incantation, before the fire, the medicine man opened a small buckskin pouch and, passing from one to another of the assembled Indians, touched each upon the forehead with an eagle's feather which he had produced from his medicine bag. This ceremony over, he grunted an order and four young bucks arose and passed into the tent, from which they emerged a few moments later bearing between them the form of a man trussed hand and foot with caribou-skin thongs. They deposited their burden at the feet of the medicine man and Connie caught the malevolent gleam of the glittering black eyes as the naked savage peered into the upturned face that returned the stare with a white man's laughing sneer. The man was Corporal Rickey, and for a

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moment Connie could scarcely restrain the impulse to dash into the circle and free his bound comrade. But the boy bided his time, and with clenched fists awaited the next move. The medicine man was haranguing the Indians in their own language, not a word of which the boy could understand, yet he knew from the gestures that the words boded no good for the future of Corporal Rickey. Eagerly Connie scanned the faces of the squatting Indians and, with a thrill of hope, read disapproval upon the faces of many of the older men. The medicine man had evidently reached the climax of his argument, for he ceased speaking and, stooping swiftly, caught a blazing brand from the fire. Slowly—very slowly he advanced to the bound feet of the captive. Then, for the first time, Connie saw that the feet were bare—saw, also, that which caused the hot blood to rush to his head in a red surge of rage—the medicine man in the act of applying the flaming brand to the naked soles of Corporal Rickey's feet.

With no thought for consequences, the boy threw caution to the wind, sprang into the fire-light, and with one kick hurled the blazing torch

full into the face of the stooping medicine man. Instantly the air was filled with red sparks and the frenzied shrieks of the naked savage, as, with hair ablaze, he clawed and slapped wildly at the glowing sparks that clung close and bit deep into his grease-smeared flesh.



“With one kick Connie hurled the blazing torch full into the face of the stooping medicine man.”

“Good work!” yelled Rickey. “Well, Jumpin’ Jerushelam, if it ain’t the kid!”

The Indians were on their feet, now. Some springing to the assistance of the discomfited medicine man, and others advancing threateningly upon the diminutive figure that had leaped so suddenly out of the fog.

“Look alive, kid! Where’s the others?” The

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voice of Rickey was low and tense, and Connie whispered quickly:

"I'm alone. Can they talk English?"

"Some of 'em—a little. They trade on the Mackenzie."

Without answering, the boy faced the Indians who were closing about him, urged on by the frantic medicine man. He held up a small hand and, for an instant, the red men hesitated. The boyish voice cut clear, in tones of authority: "Stop! The first man that moves, dies!" The Service gun flashed from its holster and the firelight glinted ominously on its blue-black barrel as the hesitating Indians glanced uncertainly from one to the other.

"You can't get away with it, kid!" warned Rickey. "It's the old dervish, yonder. He's got 'em all gloomed up to die anyhow." His words were drowned in a flood of unintelligible vituperation, as the medicine man urged the Indians on. But, either the bucks knew they had plenty of time, or none cared to hasten his forthcoming journey to the Happy Hunting Ground, for despite the medicine man's raving, the Indians evinced a noticeable reluctance to obey. Pressing



his momentary advantage, Connie again addressed them, his voice unconsciously falling into the oratorical swing he had heard at council fires beyond the Yukon.

"I am the medicine man of the white men. From beyond the mountains I come to conquer the Red Death." Slipping the revolver into its holster, he advanced until he faced the medicine man, and in his voice was no tremor of fear: "Your lips speak lies. Your heart is bad. Your medicine is no good. My medicine is strong. The Yellow Knives shall live. I have spoken."

At the words of the boy, the naked savage forgot for a moment the pain of his many burns and, drawing himself erect, addressed the Indians:

"The white men have come to the land of the Yellow Knives. They have seen that the land is good. The lakes and the rivers are full of fish. The forest is full of game. There is much fur. They would take the land for their own. Death! Death to the Yellow Knives! The white men's medicine is strong. They call upon the Evil Spirits that dwell in the caves at the home of the South Wind. The Evil Spirits journey to the land of the Yellow Knives, and behold the hand of the

## 60 Connie Morgan with the Mounted

Red Death is upon us—and we die! Our women and little children die also—and none shall be left alive. Only when the medicine of the red men is stronger than the medicine of the white men shall the Yellow Knives be freed from the hand of the Red Death. Only when the bodies of the white men are burned with fire will the Evil Spirits flee in fear from the land of the Yellow Knives, and the Red Death depart from our lodges. I, Spotted Dog, have spoken.”

Connie was quick to see that the man’s words had carried weight with the Indians, and once more his young voice rang clear as he glanced fearlessly into the circle of scowling faces:

“Yellow Knives, you have heard the great lie from the lips of your medicine man. His heart is black, and he speaks with a forked tongue when he says only when the bodies of the white men are burned will the Red Death depart from your lodges. Hear me, now—and you shall live, and your women and children shall live, and the Red Death shall depart from your lodges forever.”

He reached into his pocket and produced the package of vaccination points, which he held aloft. “See! The little medicine arrows of the white

men! Whoever is wounded upon the arm by the little arrow fears not the Red Death. A little wound like the scratch of a twig—in a few days a small sickness—and never more can the Red Death harm him. If my lips have spoken a lie, then shall you burn me, and my brother, also.”

Swiftly he rolled back the sleeve of his coat and of his shirt and bared his arm upon which, still red from recent vaccination, a scar showed plainly in the flare of the firelight. “See, it is the sign of the medicine arrow! The Red Death cannot harm me!”

Suddenly he whirled upon the medicine man: “Come, we shall see who speaks with the forked tongue! It shall be the test. Together we will go into a lodge of the Red Death. We shall pick out the man most festered, upon whom the hand of the Red Death lies heaviest, and we shall touch with our hands his sores, and shall breathe his breath, and stay in his lodge for an hour. Then shall we wait eight sleeps—and these shall be the judges. Before the eighth sleep, you shall be stricken, and the hand of the Red Death shall be upon you, and I shall be unharmed. If my words are true, then all shall be wounded upon the

## 62 Connie Morgan with the Mounted

arm, for I have arrows for all—and they shall live.”

Connie ceased, and Corporal Rickey, who had listened to the words, saw that the Indians were divided among themselves. With a great effort he wriggled to a sitting posture and called loudly: “White Eagle!” At the sound, an old Indian advanced a step and remained motionless, while Rickey spoke in a loud voice: “You, and not yonder lying fool are Chief of the Yellow Knives. Speak, now. You have heard the words of truth from the lips of my brother. You have been to the posts. You are very wise, and you know the white men of the rivers—the factors, and the traders of fur. Have they not dealt fairly with you? And is not the plan of my brother a fair one? We still remain in your power. If my brother has lied, you may burn us.”

The chief glanced over the faces of his people and his eye fell upon the face of the medicine man, who seemed in no wise anxious to accept Connie’s challenge. And then he spoke, slowly, and with much wisdom:

“You have listened, oh, Yellow Knives, to the words of Spotted Dog, the medicine man.

You have listened, also, to the words of the small white man. Spotted Dog says death shall overtake all the Yellow Knives, and our wives, and our children. The white man says the Yellow Knives shall live. Is death better than life?"

Slowly he rolled back the sleeve of his heavy Hudson's Bay Company shirt. "We must all die—Spotted Dog has spoken. If we be wounded with the little medicine arrows, we shall live—the small white man has spoken. If we must die, one small wound upon the arm is nothing. If, by one small wound, and one small sickness, we shall live—what is one small wound? Life is better than death, and we can do no worse than die—and Spotted Dog says we shall die anyway."

He extended his arm toward Connie. "Come, we shall be wounded upon our arms, and we shall bring in our squaws and papooses." A volley of protest surged from the lips of Spotted Dog—but the star of the medicine man had set—White Eagle silenced him with a gesture, and, motioning to the young men, ordered them to bind him and throw him into his lodge.

"We weary of your howling," spoke the chief. "Not one life has it saved in the village. When the

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white man has finished with us, you shall go with him to the tepee of Long Raven, who is covered with the sores of the Red Death, and you shall touch him with your hands, and we shall see whose medicine is strong." The young men bound Spotted Dog and carried him howling to his lodge and pitched him into its blackness.

One by one, following the lead of their chief, the braves of the Yellow Knives bared their arms and allowed Connie to scratch the skin with the tiny vaccination points. Then the squaws and papooses were herded to the fire and it was long past midnight when Connie scratched the last arm and returned the remaining points to his pocket. Then he turned to White Eagle and extended his hand:

"Your words are words of wisdom. The Red Death will depart from your lodges. Only those already sick shall die. Loose, now, my brother. We shall remain among you until the danger is past. We shall carry food to the sick, and bury those who die, that the Yellow Knives need not visit the lodges of the Red Death."

And White Eagle himself stooped and cut the thongs and, as Rickey rose stiffly, he spoke:



"You are free to move about the village, only do not seek to escape. My young men will watch you, and if you leave the village, you shall surely die. If at the end of eight sleeps none of those who are wounded have been stricken with the Red Death, then will the Yellow Knives swear a great friendship for the white men, and you may return to the land of your people. But, if these are stricken, then shall you both be burned. Come, we shall take Spotted Dog and the small white man to the lodge of Long Raven." But when they entered the lodge of Spotted Dog, they found it empty — and Spotted Dog was nowhere to be found.

"I always said it!" exclaimed Sergeant McKeever, as he lay propped on his elbow upon a couch in the barracks at Dawson, and listened to Corporal Rickey's account of what happened that night at the council fire of the Yellow Knives, "Brains an' nerve is worth more than beef, anyways you take it."

"Sure are!" assented Rickey, chuckling with laughter. "You should of seen that medicine man dancin' around with his hair all a-fire, howlin'

## 66 Connie Morgan with the Mounted

bloody murder, an' a-clawin' at the sparks that settled over his greasy hide like a swarm of red-hot mosquitoes." And his laughter was echoed by a dozen or more officers who had listened to the tale, until Connie felt his face redden under their approving glances. And then, from the doorway, where he had stood a silent and an unseen listener, the Superintendent himself stepped into the room and laid a kindly hand on Connie's shoulder:

"Great work, son. We are proud of you, in the Mounted." Which was a very long speech of approbation for the Superintendent to make. And, later, when the long envelope went southward in the mail, bearing his official report to general headquarters in far-off Regina, the name of Special Constable Connie Morgan was mentioned for extraordinary bravery in the rescue of Corporal Rickey from the Yellow Knife Indians.

## CHAPTER V

### WHAT HAPPENED ON CAMERON CREEK

CONNIE MORGAN laid aside his year-old magazine and stepped to the door of the little police cabin, perched upon the verge of a high bank of the Yukon. At the foot of the steep descent Sergeant McKeever stood in a canoe and finished buttoning the canvas cover over the deck of the light speed boat that lay anchored a few feet out from the bank. Then, still standing, he paddled ashore and drew the canoe from the water.

Connie thrust a pan of baking-powder biscuits into the oven of the sheet-iron stove, drew the coffee-pot forward, poked some bull-pine sticks into the stove, and sliced bacon into a blackened frying-pan.

A few moments later, through a blue haze of bacon-smoke, he greeted the officer who stooped to enter the low door:

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"Hi, Dan! Just in time for supper—didn't expect you till midnight."

The Sergeant grinned: "Can't make me mad with supper—I'm hungry as a grizzly—Come clean through from Dawson without a stop."

"What's your hurry? But, come on, let's eat first. You can tell me the news later."

The two ate heartily, and in silence. For, with the men of the open places, a meal is a matter of serious business, rather than a social event. Also, in silence, they washed the dishes, and sought the log that answered the double purpose of door-step and chopping-block. The scene before them was one of infinite grandeur. The long-gathering twilight of an early summer night enfolded the wide valley of the Yukon in a mantle of exquisite softness. Beyond, jumbled and blurred in the indistinct half-light, rose the dark, timbered foot-hills of the great white range to the eastward. And still beyond, rearing its naked crags and gilded pinnacles above the shadowed foreground, rose the great range itself—all bright and flashing many-coloured lights—like the turrets, and spires, and battlements of a wonderful city of gold. For the rays of the low-swung sun,

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withdrawn a full two hours from the valley, shone directly upon the ice-peaks, so that fairyland seemed to leap in full glory from the black pall of night. For many minutes the two officers of the Mounted gazed, speechless, upon the sight.

"Oh, isn't it wonderful!" breathed the boy.

"Yes, son, it's wonderful," answered Sergeant McKeever, softly. "Us—up here in the North—we ain't got many of what you might call luxuries, but, son—" he pointed toward the gilded mountains, "seems like God more'n makes it up to us, with sights like *that*, an' the aurora, an'——"

"I love it all!" exclaimed the boy, "it's so big, and free, and grand! I love even the cold, and the white snow-levels, and the roaring rapids, and the grinding ice! Why, I wouldn't live back there," his hand swept the southern horizon, "for all the money in the world!"

"No, son—you won't go back," said McKeever, gravely, "the big North has *got* you. You're a sure enough *tillicum*—an' you can't go back!" The Sergeant paused, and his next observation drew the boy's mind from the beauties of nature to the affairs of the world of men.

"I seen Bill Cosgrieve in Dawson."

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Now, Bill Cosgrieve was known as "The King of Cameron Creek," and Cameron Creek enjoyed an unsavoury reputation among the law-abiding—and, the more unsavoury became its reputation, the more Cameron Creek enjoyed it.

In the days of the great gold rush, the camp of Two Prong flourished on the site of old Jimmie Ferguson's rich placer strike. But the sand was only shallow drift, the placers ran out, and, as a disgruntled miner told it: "Two Prong jes' na'ch'ly flourished itself plumb down to bed rock, an' blow'd up." One by one, the cabins were deserted as their owners sought other fields, or followed fresh stampedes. Freight-loaded poling-boats, and light bark canoes no longer ascended the creek, and in the winter, snow lay deep over its valley. But Cameron Creek was not entirely deserted. Two or three of the rotting cabins of Two Prong were still tenanted, and in the long, log room that had once been the N. C. Company's store, old Jap Kinkade kept a few shelves of canned goods, and a dejected assortment of mittens, tobacco, and clothing. And, above Two Prong, strung along the whole length of its hundred miles of mountain windings, were the isolated



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cabins of trappers, and old-time prospectors who may be found in the hills about the head-waters of any placer creek, hammering and chipping their lives away in vain search for that will-o'-the-wisp of the prospector's dreams—the mother lode.

Possibly twenty white men, all told, and a band of half-starved Indians, who dwelt near the head waters, comprised the population of Cameron Creek—and these were they who enjoyed, and encouraged the disrepute into which the valley had fallen. For the trappers of fur desire solitude and bear no love for the miners, whose noisy camps, detonating blasts, and creaking windlasses drive the fur-bearers to the fastness of far hills. The lean, distant-eyed prospectors for the mother lode desire solitude. And the Indians upon the head-waters—well, nobody cares what they desire. So Cameron Creek enjoyed her unsavoury repute.

“What was Bill Cosgrieve doing in Dawson?” asked Connie, as the big Sergeant showed no disposition to further enlighten him.

“Spendin' money.”

“Wonder if he's made a strike. Guess not, though. When Cameron Creek blew up, she blew right.”

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"I said *money*," affirmed the Sergeant, "not dust."

The boy's shoulders straightened with interest. "You mean—treaty money?"

The older man shrugged: "It was paid on the first. Guess you an' me'd better jest slip up Cameron Creek an' have a look at them there aborigines."

Although Constable Morgan and Sergeant McKeever left the speed boat anchored in front of the little police cabin, crossed the river, and slipped down the ten intervening miles to the mouth of Cameron Creek in a canoe, under cover of darkness, they knew before they had proceeded five miles up the creek, that word of their coming had preceded them. A mile in advance, a couple of eagles rose in swift spirals, and numerous flocks of startled ducks whizzed past in their flight to the big river. Also, the path of a short portage across the neck of a horseshoe bend was wet, where a canoe had been dragged from the water, and the scar of its relaunching was plain in the clay of the upriver end.

"Moccasin telegraph!" growled McKeever, "can you beat it?"

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Twelve miles above the mouth, where the deserted cabins of Two Prong straggled along the



“Constable Morgan and Sergeant McKeever knew that word of their coming had preceded them.”

bank, the officers landed and banged upon the door of old Jap Kinkade’s store.

“What’s wanted?” queried a petulant voice.  
“Can’t ye give a man time to git up?”

“Oh, can that rot, Jap! I’m hep to you—I’m McKeever.” The door opened and the ill-kempt old man blinked sleepily.

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"Somethin' ye wanted?" he inquired, sourly.

"Breakfast," answered McKeever.

"This ain't no *hotel*. This here's a store," growled the proprietor.

"Never you mind about that. You cook breakfast—an' do it *pronto*. An' while you're doin' it you can tell me who's be'n here this mornin'."

"Wha' d' ye mean—be'n here? Ain't I jes' got up? Youse is the firs' ones I've see. 'Pears to me ye're almighty early, too. What's up?" The little eyes of the old man leered wickedly, as he threw some bacon into a frying-pan.

"You're lyin', Jap. Some day I'm goin' to have the fun of squintin' at you through the bars, at Dawson——"

"'Tain't no crime to lay a-bed till four in the mornin'. Not as I've heerd tell, it ain't," sneered the man.

"Who's be'n here, I said?" snapped McKeever, ignoring the interruption.

"Ef any one's be'n here, they've passed on. I ain't saw no one—but my eyesight ain't no good no more—'special, when I'm asleep."

"Where's Cosgrieve?"

Again the little eyes leered wickedly: "Ef ye

## What Happened on Cameron Creek 75

don't know, ye mout step acrost to his cabin, an' ef he ain't there, ye mout take a guess at it. How'd ye s'pose I know where Cosgrieve's at. Dang him! He——"

"He, *what?*" asked McKeever, quickly. But the other only eyed him insolently.

"He what! He what!" mocked the old man. "Ye talk like a jackass. He what—he what—he haw—he haw!"

McKeever curbed his wrath, and the two officers ate in silence, while old Jap glared malevolently from his seat on the pine counter. When they arose to go the old man followed them to the door: "Toddle along up the crick an' have a look at ye're dear Injuns. See ef some of 'em's be'n stole by us Cameron Crickers. An' then toddle back an' climb in ye're canoe an' report to Dawson that all's well—like ye allus do. Ye're a smart bunch—youse Mounteds is—but ye ain't the ondy smart folks in the world—Ta-ta!"

"I'll get that old scoundrel yet!" gritted McKeever. "They's somethin' crooked about this whole blame creek—but we've never be'n able to hang anythin' *on* 'em."

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Above Two Prong the water was too fast for canoe work, so the officers took the foot trail that followed its banks. For three days they pushed onward and upward, stopping in every cabin along the trail for a chat with the surly, close-mouthed trappers and prospectors. But nothing did they see that could possibly be construed as "crooked," except the interminable windings of the creek, itself, and so they came to the camp of the Indians. The chief, a lazy, ragged, no-account, who went by the name of Four-Bits-And-A-Thin-Dime, greeted the policemen civilly enough, and motioned them to a seat upon a bearskin in front of his tepee.

"Any complaints?" asked McKeever. The Indian shook his head.

"No."

"Get your treaty money all right?"

The chief nodded: "Um-hum."

"Where is it?" This last question came as a surprise. The chief looked nonplussed for a moment.

"Got some lef'. De young men, she tak' de res' down to buy de grub."

"Where?"



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“Me not know—mebbe-so, Coal Creek—Buxton—Forty-mile—mebbe-so Jap Kinkade.”

“What’s the use of lyin’? Get up! I’m goin’ to search every tepee in the village. The young men bought fire-water with it—an’ you did, too! An’ you bought it of Cosgrieve!”

The Indian smiled and shrugged, and followed behind while McKeever and Connie searched the lodges and found nothing.

“Wish I could talk to them squaws,” mused McKeever, “but they can’t understand no English—let alone talk it. I guess it’s goin’ to be the same old story. It’s the moccasin telegraph does it—everyone on Cameron knows we’re comin’ soon as we hit the mouth, an’ time we get to Two Prong, the whole creek’s good as a Sunday-school before Christmas.”

In silence, the two made their way out of the encampment and down the creek. At the end of an hour, Connie spoke:

“Dan, you’ve always used this trail, haven’t you—and the rest of the boys, too—when they’ve visited Cameron Creek?”

“Sure, it’s the only trail they is.”

“Well, maybe,” assented Connie, “but suppose

## 78 Connie Morgan with the Mounted

it isn't? The valley is anywhere from a quarter- to a half-mile wide. Maybe there is something we might find along the edges. We've got lots of time, let's each take a side and work along the foot of the hills——”

“Time!” exclaimed McKeever, “I'd stay here all summer, if I thought we could clean up this gang! That's a good idee. The goin's a-goin' to be rough, an' it mightn't do no good—but it won't do no harm. The first one to get to Jap's waits for the other. An' if we want one another, here's the signals: two quick shots an' one fifteen seconds later means, come a-runnin'. One shot first, an' then two quick ones means, come cautious, look for trouble.”

“I got you,” assented Connie; “I'll tackle the left bank, and you take the right—So long!”

“So long!” cried McKeever, and both turned from the trail.

The valley was a quarter of a mile wide at the point where they separated, the ground rising gently from the bed of the creek to the base of almost perpendicular rock walls. Connie worked his way to the foot of the rock ledge and headed down stream, picking his way among boulders

## What Happened on Cameron Creek 79

and through thickets of spruce and of aspen, and tangles of underbrush which, in many places, grew so thick that the boy was forced to chop his way through with his camp axe, to emerge onto a stretch of bare rock where the footing was good. But, on rock or in the timber, Connie's eyes were always busy, searching the ground for sign, and the timber and rock wall for a hidden *cache*, or a trail leading into the hills. It was slow, hard work, darkness overtook him upon the edge of a thin strip of stunted timber, and he spread his blankets beside a tiny spring that welled up between the roots of a balsamian. He made no fire, but ate *charqui* and cold biscuits which he washed down with water from the spring.

It was darker here than in the wide valley of the Yukon, and the high walls shut out the view of the sunshine on distant peaks. Suddenly, the boy's eyes caught the flicker of a light through the trees. All thought of sleep vanished and, looking to his Service revolver in its holster at his belt, he gripped his camp axe, threw himself face downward, and began to wriggle toward the light, pausing every few seconds to listen. But the valley was silent as the grave, and presently,

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peering through the underbrush, he made out the outlines of a cabin, from whose uncurtained window shone a bright square of candlelight. Slowly and cautiously, he edged forward: "If they've got dogs I'm up against it," he muttered, and tightened his grip on his axe. A small clearing surrounded the cabin—so small that although Connie lay concealed by the underbrush, the window was only twenty-five feet distant. "If there are dogs, so much the worse for the dogs," he gritted, and crawling into the open, wriggled swiftly to the wall of the cabin. From within came the voices of men, but strain his ears as he would, he could not catch their words, and dared not risk showing his face at the window. Cautiously he explored the wall with his fingers. The rough logs were chinked with moss, and Connie drew the sheath knife from his belt. Carefully he picked and prodded at the moss chinking, removing it shred by shred from between the logs. Being ignorant of the positions of the men, he did not dare punch the moss inward. As the chinking thinned, the voices became more distinct, and at length the boy placed his eye to a tiny hole through which filtered a single ray of candlelight.

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There were two men in the room—one he could not see, the other was a shaggy man who sat beside the stove and smoked a pipe. The man out of line was speaking and Connie applied his ear to the crevice.

“—never found out nawthin’ yet, an’ they never won’t, neither. Bill Cosgrieve’s a heap too smart fer them geezers.”

“Ye say they searched the Injin camp, an’ went on down the crick?”

“Searched every blame wigwam, an’ nary a find. Bowen an’ the Swede had the stuff an’ the young bucks *cached* up a branch where they c’d a scattered to the high places if needful.”

“When’d th’ p’lice hike back?”

“This mornin’. Ort to fetch Split Rock tonight, an’ Jap’s place tomorry. Ol’ Jap’s sore on Bill Cosgrieve.”

“So much the worse f’r Jap, then. He better haul in his horns an’ not crowd Bill too fer. Bill’ll croak him, like he done th’ German——”

“Shet up! Each one of them two has got enough on t’other to swing ’em both. Jap ort to know Bill ain’t a-goin’ to leave him grab no more’n what the rest of us gits—” The speaker paused abruptly.

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"What's ailin' ye? Hear sunthin'?" Connie's heart thumped almost audibly as the man delayed his reply.

"Naw, I wuz a-thinkin'. How much stuff has Ol' Jap got in th' shaft?"

"'Bout two hundred gallon."

"Ef we c'd git red of it fer him—unbeknownst to Bill—gimlet it off, so's he'd think it leaked out——"

"Be y'u a plumb fool?" The voice of the man by the stove held a note of fear. "Don't y'u never try to double-cross Bill Cosgrieve. Y'u won't git away with it—an' they'll be another shaft to cave in down to Two Prong."

"Guess y'u're right—but——"

"Bill, he'll be back tomorry, an' we'll hev a hard day, totin' that stuff up to th' *cache*. He'll likely fetch four-hundred gallon—them Injins has got jes' about enough left to pay fer it. I'm a-goin' to roll in." The shaggy man unlaced a hobnailed boot. The other crossed to the bunk, and Connie recognized him as Crane, whom Corporal Rickey had once pointed out to him in Dawson, as a member of the Cameron Creek gang.



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"Bill, he's a wise ol' owl," grinned Crane; "with two of the Mounted scourin' Cameron Crick, he's a-keepin' the rest a-watchin' him in Dawson, whilst McCarty an' High Light Hank runs the cargo up Henderson to the divide. Beats all they ain't no one tumbled to th' Henderson Crick racket——"

"It's so durn little an' puny lookin'—'tain't more'n eight foot wide at the mouth—an' comin' out th' way it does, behine that shoulder of rock. It ain't on no map that I ever see—but she shore is deep!" The shaggy man blew out the candle, and Connie Morgan wriggled back into the timber and sought his blanket beside the spring.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONNIE GETS UP IN THE MORNING

WITH the faintest grey of approaching dawn, the boy rolled his blankets and, without stopping for breakfast, stole noiselessly away—intent only upon placing distance between himself and the cabin in the timber. He was fairly bursting with importance. Here was he, Connie Morgan, the youngest and newest of all the officers of the Royal North-west Mounted Police Force, in possession of the key to the Cameron Creek mystery! He had listened to the talk of the barracks, and knew that for years the men of the Mounted had been trying to “get something on” this gang of outlaws—and, always they had failed. But the Mounted never “quits”—not a man in the Service but knew that some day the gang would be bested—and not a man in the Service but longed to be the means of its undoing.

For two hours the boy plodded onward and then

## Connie Gets up in the Morning 85

sat down to a cold breakfast. He got out his police map and searched for Henderson's Creek. It was not there. Connie was in a dilemma—Should he summon McKeever? Or, should he go it alone?

"I'll go it alone, anyway, for a while," he decided. "If I shoot now, other ears besides Dan's would hear it, and it would be all off, for this trip."

Folding his map, he shouldered his pack and struck off along the rock wall. Suddenly he halted. So engrossed had he become with his problem that he had failed to notice that his feet were following a well-defined trail! He proceeded more cautiously, now, pausing frequently to listen. Only silence. The trail bent sharply to the wall and the boy found himself before a narrow crevice, or crack, in the solid rock. The trail ended at the crevice whose floor slanted upward at a gradient so steep as to be a veritable stairway. Only for a second, Connie hesitated, and then plunged into the opening.

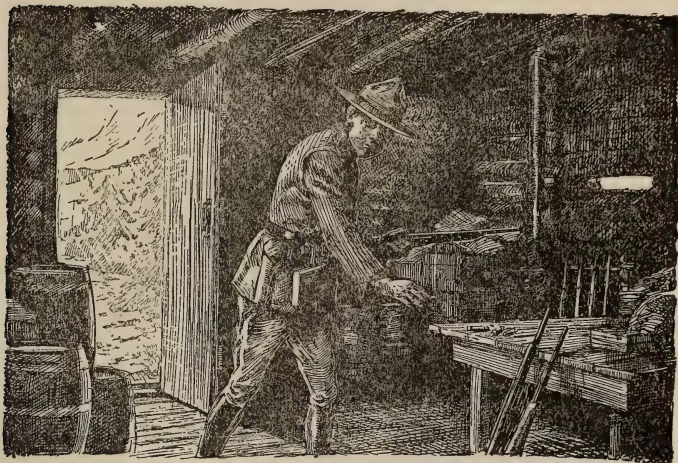
Up, up, he climbed, following the steep windings of the crack. The click of his boot-heels sounded like thunder in his ears.

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"If I meet one of 'em coming down, it will be Good Night, for one of us," he panted; "and it won't be me, either," he added, as he glanced toward the holster where the rubber-plated butt of his Service revolver showed within easy reach of his hand. Without warning, his head and shoulders emerged into bright sunlight, and before him, not ten yards distant, was a cabin. Back into the crack he popped, and held his breath. Silence. He removed his cap and cocked a scrutinizing eye over the edge—the cabin looked tenantless, and he saw that it was a very small cabin, and that it was cunningly built upon the rim of the high cliff, but cleverly concealed from the valley below by a thick growth of scraggy cedars, that extended out over the edge. Toward the south and west the ground slanted abruptly into the timber. The valley lay to the northward, and on the east, a higher shoulder of rock cut off all view. Warily the boy drew himself up and, after a reassuring survey, crossed noiselessly to the door. It was of heavy whip-sawed timber, and instead of windows there were narrow slits between the logs. "Loopholes," thought Connie, and noticed that the slits commanded the head of

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the trail, and of another trail that led into the timber to the southward. "It's like a fort," he muttered, and placed his eye to a slit. Inside were a bunk, a small stove, a rack containing a



"Crossing swiftly to the rack of rifles, he removed the cartridges."

dozen rifles, and along the farther side, several stout casks. "The *cache!*" he breathed, and slipping the heavy iron hasp from its staple, pushed open the door and entered. Crossing swiftly to the rack of rifles, he removed the cartridges from magazines and chambers, replaced

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the guns, carried the cartridges, together with twenty-five or thirty unopened boxes of ammunition to the cliff, and tossed them over the edge. Returning to the cabin, he closed the door, slipped the hasp over the staple as he had found it, and retired to the shelter of the timber to think. The boy had formulated no plan—the removal of the cartridges had been done on the spur of the moment—they were guns of the enemy, and therefore were safer empty,—he had drawn the fangs of the serpent—that's all. But, for all that, he was in a serious quandary—undecided as to his next move. Should he summon McKeever? Or explore the trail that entered the timber—undoubtedly, the trail to the mysterious Henderson's Creek? Connie gazed out across the valley of Cameron Creek. Because of his forced march in the early grey of the morning, he reasoned that the older officer would be still above the mouth of the cleft and in all probability would remain within sound of his shots for several hours to come. The small jaw clamped shut, and the boy stepped into the trail that slanted steeply toward the south.

Evidently, on this side of the divide the gang felt secure from interference, for little precaution



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had been taken to blind the trail which wound and zigzagged down the steep descent. At the end of a quarter of an hour, Connie heard the sound of running water, and the next moment, came abruptly upon the bank of a narrow stream.

At the foot of the trail was a broad, flat rock that evidently did service as a wharf, for littered about were bits of rope, a broken boat-pole, or two, and the staves and hoops of several casks, probably the result of a mishap in landing. The boy's eyes sparkled with pride, he had tracked the gang of whisky-runners to their lair, and now all that remained was to summon McKeever and gather them in. He turned to retrace his steps, then suddenly paused, tense as a pointer—listening. Yes, there it was again, and apparently but a short distance down stream—the unmistakable sound of voices! Like a shadow the boy slipped into the underbrush beside the trail and crawled beneath a low killikinick bush that had just burst into full leaf. Small as he was, at that moment Connie Morgan wished himself smaller, and watched with envy a thick black beetle burrow from sight beneath a piece of bark. The voices were close beside him and, peering through his screen of

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leaves, the boy made out the forms of three men—and the foremost of them was Bill Cosgrieve.

“—prob’ly up Cameron Crick, now,” the outlaw was saying. “Him an’ that kid they’ve took onto the force. I seen him in Dawson, an’ he slipped down river in a speed boat. When I come down river yeste’day the speed boat was tied up in front of the police cabin—but the cabin was empty. Crane’ll keep an’ eye on ’em though. He’d ort to report today.”

“Le’s tote this here cargo to the *cache*, an’ git shet of it,” suggested one of the others. Cosgrieve turned on him fiercely:

“Who’s runnin’ this outfit—me, or you?” he rasped, and then, to the other man: “Come on, High Light, me an’ you’s goin to the *cache* an’ git breakfast. You stay an’ make the boat fast, McCarty, an’ when she’s ready, I’ll fire three shots an’ you come on up. Then you an’ High Light go back an’ stay with the boat, an’ I’ll slip down on Cameron an’ see if them p’lice has got through nosin’ around. Doggone ’em! They can’t leave a man turn an honest dollar! But they’ve got to git up early in the mornin’ to git Bill Cosgrieve—an’ you c’n bet your sweet life on

## Connie Gets up in the Morning 91

that!" The man led the way up the trail, followed by High Light Hank, and Connie grinned to himself as he watched them disappear: "Early in the morning is right, old hand. You sure know where yours is coming from—but you don't know when!"

With an eye upon McCarty who was busy with the boat, the boy removed his boots and, stealthily as an Indian, followed Cosgrieve and High Light Hank up the trail. "I'm in a pretty fix, now," he soliloquized; "I can't signal Dan, and the chances are, I can't make the trail to Cameron Creek without being seen from the *cache*." He remembered the long rifle-slits that covered the heads of the two trails. "Anyway they can't shoot—they didn't pack guns, and those in the *cache*—Gee! Won't they be sore! Just the same, I wish they hadn't happened along so soon." A half-hour later, the boy watched from the edge of the timber while Bill Cosgrieve and High Light crossed the short open space and entered the *cache*. And then, the very smallness of the cabin made for the rum smugglers' undoing, for when they entered, they closed the door behind them to make room. Like a flash, a small figure

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shot from the timber, and, noiseless as a shadow, darted across the open. There was a grating of iron as the hasp slipped over the strong staple. The "King of Cameron Creek" heard the sound and, with a loud cry, sprang to the door and wrenched mightily. But the staple and hasp held—would have held to the pull of forty men—and through the rifle-slits came the sound of a laugh—a light, boyish laugh, as Connie Morgan drove a stout plug into the eye of the staple.

High Light leaped to the gun rack, and the next instant the wicked blue-black muzzle of a rifle protruded from a slit. Then, a small hand covered the muzzle, and a small face appeared at the opening.

"You mustn't shoot folks," said a boyish voice. "It isn't nice, and besides, you are under arrest——"

"Who in the name of Sam Hill are you?" roared the man behind the gun. "Open that door, or I will shoot!"

"Oh, no, you won't!" laughed the boy, "I'm Constable Morgan, of the Mounted, and you are my prisoners." There was a swift movement within, and the voice of High Light rang loud:

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"Don't shoot a kid, Bill! *Duck kid!*" And at the same instant, Connie heard the futile snap of a hammer descending upon a firing-pin, and, with the bellow of a wild beast, Bill Cosgrieve slammed the rifle onto the floor and reached for another—and another—and another—all the time yelling, and all but frothing with an insane rage, from the noise of which, Connie caught fragments of sentences: "Double-crossed—Imp o' Satan—stole them shells—trapped like a rat!" The passion wore itself out, the man subsided into low, vicious mutterings, and Connie peeked in at a rifle slit.

"Don't fuss, Willie. Eat your breakfast,—and don't bite the poker. I'm going to call McCarty, now—he'll want some breakfast, too." Then, suddenly dropping the note of mockery, the young voice sounded dry, and hard: "And you *shut up!* You try to warn him and it will go hard with *you*. In the Mounted we don't stand for fooling. One yip out of you, and you'll get yours —*pronto!*"

The boy walked to the edge of the cliff so that the sound would carry far out over the Cameron valley, and drew the revolver from its holster:

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“Bang—bang!——Bang!” He fired three shots—the same signal that would call McCarty would also bring big Dan McKeever—and bring him on the run!

Connie walked to the edge of the timber and seated himself upon a log close beside the trail. Ten minutes passed—twenty minutes—and then the sound of footsteps brought the revolver again from its holster.

“Hands up!” McCarty whirled and looked into the muzzle of the long-barrelled Service gun, behind which appeared the set face of a small boy—and the man noted that the boy wore the uniform of the Royal North-west Mounted Police. Swiftly, he elevated his hands. “March!” And the man, with hands reaching high above his head walked out into the clearing, followed closely by Connie.

“Well, I’ll be *jiggered*!” he gasped, when his eyes took in the situation, and in spite of himself, he snickered. The sound threw Bill Cosgrieve into another fit of passion:

“Laff! You eediot! Laff, an’ laff, an’ laff! It means a long space fer you as well as me—Ondly, personal, I don’t see where the joke comes in!”



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"You can go sit on that rock, McCarty," said Connie, indicating a boulder at the edge of the cliff. "You can't get away unless you jump over—and it's a good two hundred feet to the nearest rocks below."

"I ain't aimin' to git away, kid—leastwise, not that-a-way," he grinned, and lapsed into silence.

An hour dragged by before the sound of footsteps on the rock floor of the trail from Cameron Creek reached the ears of the boy. Beckoning to McCarty, he motioned him to be seated close beside the head of the steep rock trail, and took his own position close behind him.

"Hey!" objected the man, "you goin' to use me fer a fort?"

"You're a good little guesser," assented Connie. "You see, I'm expecting my pardner, Sergeant McKeever, any minute. If that is he, you needn't worry that he will shoot. But, if it should happen to be one of *your* friends—well, I won't worry if *he* shoots, either."

Suddenly a man burst panting into the open: "Beat it!" he cried, "The Mounted!"

"*Reach!*" commanded Connie, and with a

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gasp, the man saw the gun behind McCarty's back. He "reached" extending his arms to full length, and even standing on tiptoe, and the boy recognized him as Crane. There was a noise at the mouth of the crevice, and another man turned and whisked from sight, the clatter of loose rocks proclaiming his frenzied haste to be elsewhere. But he did not get far. A short, sharp word of command floated upward. Silence—and once more, the sound of footsteps. The man appeared again at the opening, only this time he, too, was "reaching." It was the shaggy man, and behind him walked Sergeant Dan McKeever.

"Hello, Dan!" called Connie, rising to his feet, "we've got 'em dead to rights! Three of 'em here—Cosgrieve and another in there, and some kegs, too—and more kegs in the poling-boat, down on Henderson's Creek! And evidence enough to include our friend Jap Kinkade along with 'em!"

Sergeant Dan McKeever gazed open-mouthed at the youngest constable.

"For the love of Mike, kid! I'm dreamin'! You—you—single-handed—rounded up the Cameron Creek gang! Got 'em with the goods, at last—Bill Cosgrieve, too! It ain't so—but it *is*!

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You little old sourdough, you! How'd you do it?"

Connie laughed; and affected an exaggerated yawn: "Oh, that's easy, *son*—when you get up early in the morning!"

## CHAPTER VII

### ON THE TRAIL OF THE WAR BAND

CONNIE MORGAN and Ick Far were on special patrol, the object of which was to thread certain rivers and creeks to their sources in hope of finding a pass between some tributary of upper Stewart River and a tributary of Wind River. The wilderness mail route between Dawson and far-off Fort McPherson, way up near the shore of the Arctic, was both devious and dangerous, and had already been responsible for one terrible tragedy of the wilds. Therefore, the department desired a more direct and a safer route; and Special Constable Connie Morgan and Ick Far, the weather-hardened Indian scout, after twenty days of fruitless search among the high-flung peaks of the continental backbone, stood at the head of a little valley and gazed at a rough mountain wall down which a tiny stream cascaded from ledge to ledge to

plunge, almost at their feet, into a seething cauldron of white water.

"Go oop?" asked the scout.

Connie shook his head. "No," he replied, eyeing the precarious ascent, "it would be all we could do to make it even now, in the summer. How could a mail patrol climb it in the winter—with a dog outfit besides?"

"No kin do," opined the Indian, with a grin. "Mebbe-so we find um nudder pass." And, turning, he led the way over the back trail toward the point, ten miles below, where they had left their canoe at the head of birch-bark navigation.

The ascent of the creek had taken four days, its descent took two. And on the evening of the second day they grounded the canoe on a wide bar, where the creek flowed into a larger tributary of the Stewart.

Hardly had the two set foot upon shore before Ick Far's attention became riveted upon some marks in the gravel—marks that, in the twilight, were hardly discernible to Connie—being merely a displacement of pebbles here and there among the myriads of pebbles that formed the bar. To Connie these marks meant nothing. Game was

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plentiful along the creeks—some animal had probably crossed here. Besides, there was "Soapy" White's trading post a few miles below, and several outfits of prospectors. The boy was much surprised at Ick Far's evident concern. Forward and back, he walked, along the water line, leaning far over and examining minutely each foot of gravel. Finally he turned to Connie:

"Injun cross here," he reported.

"Well, what if he did?" asked the boy.

"Mooch Injun! Two—t'ree sun 'go, she camp on de woods. Come." He turned and, following the sign in the gravel, led the way into the thicket of scrub timber that fringed the bar. A few moments later they came upon the abandoned camp—the dead ashes of a dozen small fires over which the passing Indians had cooked a hurried meal. Figuring four or five Indians to the fire, Connie realized that a considerable party had been on the move.

"What do you make of it, Ick?" he asked.

"What are they up to—hunting—fishing?"

The scout shook his head and busied himself with a minute inspection of the ground.

"Dem Mooseheads," he announced, holding in



his hand a peculiarly shaped slate knife blade which he picked from the ashes at the edge of a fire. "On de black montaine," he explained, "de Moosehead, she git de stone for de knife."

"But—what are the Mooseheads doing way down here?"

"War ban'. Dem Moosehead, she *kultus* Injun. Some tam' she lak fight. Come down an' fight dem Brushwood, on Lansing Creek."

"The Brushwoods!" exclaimed Connie. "The Brushwoods won't fight!" Ick Far grinned: "Da's w'y de Moosehead lak for fight um. De Brushwood run hide in de timbaire—in de rocks—on de montaine. Den de Moosehead she mak' de beeg yell. She shoot de gun. She bus' de *cache*. She steal de Brushwood feesh, an' de dog, an' all she kin car' 'way from de camp. She t'ink she heap *skookum* Injun. Den she gon' back home, she mak' de beeg fire on de black montaine, an' git de *kloochmen* all 'roun' an' mak' de beeg talk—heap fine fightin' mans—heap brave Injun—*Skookum tumtum!*" As the old Indian talked, Connie thought rapidly.

"How far is Lansing Creek?" he asked.

"'Bout forty—feefty mile."

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"Can we run this river in the night? Five or six hours ought to put us at the mouth of the Lansing."

The Indian shook his head vigorously: "No! No! No! Too mooch—w'at y'u call, *skookum chuck*—too mooch rapids! Daylight we start—come Lansing Creek, nine 'clock—ten 'clock."

"Roll in, then. Tomorrow, we'll have a *real* job."

"W'at y'u goin' do?"

"Do! We're going to run those thieving Mooseheads back where they belong—that's what we're going to do!"

Ick Far nodded: "Mebbe-so not wan' for go back. Mebbe-so ain' 'fraid for leetle p'lice."

"Want to go back! Well, they're going whether they want to or not. I'll show 'em who's running this country! I guess they won't try to buck the Mounted!"

Ick Far refrained from comment; but in his eye smouldered the gloom of foreboding.

The trail of the Mooseheads led down stream in the direction of Lansing Creek. Having come overland along the ridges, the marauding band brought no canoes and their progress was slow, as

the conformation of the valley necessitated frequent fording of the river to avoid impassable barriers. Again and again, as the canoe shot down stream, Connie and the scout saw signs of these crossings upon gravel bars and clay banks, and at each crossing the trail grew fresher.

Two weeks before, while ascending the river, the officers had passed the tepees of isolated families of Brushwoods, who had strayed to the larger river to fish. They had passed, also, three different outfits of prospectors and the post of "Soapy" White, a free-trader whose record in his dealings with the Indians of many tribes was described on the books of the Mounted as "shady."

The tepees of the Indians were missing, now. At each deserted camp the two landed, carefully examined the ground, and read signs of hurried flight and the abandonment of the poor effects of the campers—effects that the Mooseheads, not deeming of sufficient value to carry away, had ruthlessly destroyed, leaving only charred remnants of burned tepees and nets, and the broken fragments of utensils.

The white prospectors had fared no better. Their camps were deserted and their goods carried

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away or burned, but, as yet, Ick Far had been unable to find any evidence of bloodshed.

"Dem all skeep oot. Brushwood, she skeep for Lansing. Mebbe-so we fin' dem white men. Tak' um 'long. She be glad for git crack at dem Moosehead." And, in a short time, Ick's prophecy was fulfilled, for the canoe was greeted by a shout from a niche in the rocks of a narrow canyon, and two heads with bearded faces peered over the rim of a natural rock barrier. Ick Far shot the canoe shoreward and the men came out of their fortress—a short man, and a tall man.

"Come on!" cried Connie. "Bring your rifles and all the shells you've got, and we'll dig out after those Indians."

"Well, f'r th' love o' Pete!" exclaimed the short man. "It's a kid an' a *Siwash*! What d'ye mean, dig out after them Injuns? Great sufferin' cats! They's a milliun of 'em!"

"No, there aren't," contradicted Connie. "There are only fifty or sixty at the most—hurry up! I'm Special Constable Morgan, of the Mounted, and I'm going to round 'em up."

"What, you? The Mounted! Holy mackerel! I thought that unyform looked f'miliar, but, seein'

it onto a kid, that-a-way, it th'ow'd me off complete. But, how in time y'u goin' to round up them here Injuns?"

"Come along and see. I need your help. We'll show 'em. Where are the other white men?"

"Got acrost th' ridge," answered the tall man, who glanced into his partner's face, and then dubiously at the two in the canoe.

"Shove off!" commanded Connie. "These specimens are afraid to tackle it, and we can't waste time." Ick Far placed the end of his paddle against the bank, but before he could bear his weight on it, the tall man stepped forward.

"Hold on, kid, we ain't afraid. Y'u got us wrong—dead wrong. We're peaceable parties when they's any chanst to be, but when a hull pack o' howlin' red-skins comes a-kihootin' down th' crick an' confisticates our outfit, an' trees us up a rock ledge, it's time sunthin' was did. We can't figger out how such a little shaver happens to be a-wearin' that unyform, but if y'u're good enough f'r th' Mounted y'u're good enough f'r we—eh, Toad?" The other emphatically assented and as they took their places the tall man further elucidated:

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"I'm Tex Gordon, which my pardner, here, he's Toad Jones, owin' of him bein' short an' ugly, that-a-way, an' warty. Toad's hide's a reg'lar garden f'r warts—but inside, he's all to th' good. Wisht we had couple more paddles."

Once in the current, there was small need for paddles, and an hour later, riding straight and true through the rock-tossed waves of a white water rapid, the canoe, under the skilful guidance of Ick Far, shot into comparatively smooth water, and Connie's shoulders suddenly stiffened. There on the bank, unmolested by the marauding Indians, stood "Soapy" White's trading post.

"Land here!" cried the boy, sharply. And a moment later, the canoe grounded in front of the log building. Hardly had its nose touched the gravel before the boy leaped ashore and made straight for the door, closely followed by Ick Far and the two prospectors. Without ceremony, Connie pushed open the door and was met by the leering face of "Soapy" himself, who sat propped against a bale of blankets upon his counter. The man's blotched face and bleared eyes told that he had been drinking heavily, but, at the sight of the uniform he pulled himself together and favoured



the newcomers with a thick-lipped, vacuous grin. Connie wasted no time:

"Where are those Indians?" he jerked out, sharply.

"Wot Injuns—yer mean them Brushwoods up ther crick?"

"You know what Indians! Come, I'm not here to fool with *you*! Speak up—or you'll wish you had!"

The smile left the man's face and he glanced uneasily from the trim figure in uniform to the two prospectors. Then his lips moved and he growled an answer: "Passed here at sun-up."

"What did they camp here for? Where are they heading for? And why did they leave you alone?" The questions came hard, and quick—like shots from an automatic.

The man answered in confusion: "Camped here to trade. Why shouldn't they leave me 'lone—wash y'u mean, leave 'lone, anyhow? They went on down the crick. They camped here to trade, wash y'u s'pose——"

"Trade what?"

"Trade—wash y'u s'pose, trade? I got a tradin' license, ain't I?"

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Connie's eyes swept the room. He pointed to a shelf: "Those shells, Ick—take 'em all!"

The scout walked over to a shelf and began to take down boxes of cartridges.

"You sold a lot of shells, didn't you?" flashed the boy. "When we went up the river you had about two hundred boxes, now you have about thirty."

"Well, wot if I did?"

Connie cut him short: "All right, boys, bring the shells and come on. How about grub? Pack what we need down to the canoe."

"Hey! Don't I git paid?" whined "Soapy," who watched as the three made up packs from the shelves.

"Requisitioned," snapped Connie.

"Sign a requisition, then," demanded "Soapy," who had risen to his feet.

"I'll sign nothing!" exclaimed the boy, shaking his fist in the man's face. "And what's more, I'm coming back here and tend to your case—get out of my way!"

"All aboard, boys—come alive!" he cried and, pushing past the swaying, blinking figure by the counter, made for the canoe.

On Lansing Creek, a mile above its mouth, the

spur of a timbered ridge terminates abruptly in a high promontory around which the creek makes a sharp curve, forming a horseshoe bend. And upon this spur, whose timber formed some slight protection from the bitter winds of winter, a small band of the Brushwoods had set up their village of tepees. They are a peaceful people, lazy and self-satisfied, living upon game and fish, and the barter of fur. To supply their need for firewood, lodge-poles, and timber for sleds and *caches*, the Indians had cleared the trees from the ridge for a space of several hundred yards between the village on the extreme end of the spur and the mountains that towered upon the land side. And this was the village the Mooseheads had undertaken to plunder.

Long before Ick Far beached the canoe at the mouth of the Lansing, the sound of scattering shots reached the ears of its occupants.

"They've run onto th' Brushwoods!" exclaimed Toad. "They's a-goin' to be some scrappin' along this here crick, an' if we aim to do any good we'd better dive into it—listen at that!" Even as the man spoke, the shots suddenly burst into a furious fusilade. Volley after volley came

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rattling down the creek, and at the sound a strange sense of elation possessed Connie Morgan, his heart felt light and his small hands gripped tightly his carbine as he curbed a desire to dash madly into the thick of the fray. Just one short mile away a real battle was raging—a battle that was his to command, and that he must win against fearful odds. The thought steadied his nerves and his jaw clamped firm. The canoe was drawn from the water and *cached* in the thicket.

“They’re a-wastin’ shells!” exclaimed Tex Gordon.

“Dem droonk—‘Soapy’ White, she trade um de firewater,” explained Ick Far.

Connie nodded: “I knew it,” he said, quietly. “That’s why I told him I would tend to his case later.” He dug the butt of his carbine viciously into the gravel. “I’ll fix his clock! I’ll take him down to Dawson and he’ll stand trial, not only for boot-legging, but for murder—and I’ll see to it that he gets a separate trial for every person—white or red, that’s killed or wounded in this fight! We’ve been after him for a long time, and I guess what we’ve got on him now will hold him for a while.”

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A short council was held and the four decided to slip through the bush to a point opposite the spur, from whence the scout assured them he could gain access to the village by means of an obscure foot trail that zigzagged up the face of the cliff.

The three found it no easy task to follow Ick Far through the scrub, dodging silently from bush to bush, making swift, low dashes across open spaces, or flattening themselves among the rocks of the creek bank. Nearly an hour was consumed in traversing the distance that brought them to the crest of a low hill which commanded a view of the village—or rather of the timber-crowned ridge where the village had been. For no tepees were visible, evidently having been pulled down to render a less conspicuous target for the bullets of the enemy, or because the lodge-poles were needed to strengthen the barricade that was being erected across the base of the horseshoe at the edge of the clearing, upon the opposite edge of which the attacking party had massed and was firing volley after volley with the evident intention of intimidating the Brushwoods. The four onlookers noted with satisfaction that the besieged Indians were not returning the fire, but were working

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like beavers in the strengthening of their barricade. So precipitous were the escarpments of the ridge upon the three sides bounded by the creek that any attack from this quarter was out of the question; and Ick Far pointed out the narrow foot trail that showed as a faint tracery upon the face of the rock wall.

"Me go oop. Tell de Brushwood we com'. You stay here. I wave um blanket, you com' oop."

Connie nodded: "Go ahead—and hurry. Before the Mooseheads find out there is a path on this side."

Swift and silent as a shadow, the Indian scout made his way to the creek, forded it, and began the ascent of the foot trail, while from their position among the rocks of the hilltop, the three watched his movements with breathless interest.

"Looks like a fly a-crawlin' up a wall," whispered Toad Jones.

"P-s-s-s-t," the sound hissed sharply between Tex Gordon's clenched teeth, and his hand pressed Toad closer behind his rock. And not a moment too soon, for there, not twenty yards distant, also intently watching Ick Far's ascent, crouched two



half-naked, paint-smeared Mooseheads. Even as those on the hilltop looked, the savages, rifles in hand, slipped noiselessly into the shelter of another rock and shortened their range on the climbing scout by five yards. As Connie drew back the hammer of his carbine, he noted the scowling faces



There, close at hand, "crouched two half-naked, paint-smeared Mooseheads."

and the ugly, painted bodies—noted, too, the swift, gliding movements that would carry them within easy range long before Ick Far could possibly gain the top of the ridge. There was a soft movement beside him, and two muffled "clicks" told him that the prospectors also had cocked their rifles.

"Wait," whispered the boy, "don't shoot till you have to. I'm going to give them a chance to surrender." He stood upright, carbine in hand

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and, although the backs of the two Indians were, by this time, almost directly toward him, both whirled on the instant. At the same time, behind their rocks, the eyes of Tex Gordon and Toad Jones squinted along the barrels of their rifles until the sights found the exact centre of the great yellow circle that adorned the breast of each Indian. For a moment the two bucks stared in astonishment at the slight, uniformed figure that had seemingly sprung from the earth itself, then, without warning, both rifles flew up—two reports sounded as one, and two thin puffs of smoke dissolved into the air—from the muzzles of the prospectors' rifles. One Indian pitched forward and crashed heavily to the ground, where he lay without a sound, but the other, dropping his rifle, clutched frantically at his shoulder and staggered backward among the rocks.

"Better le'me finish him," pleaded Toad Jones. "A doggone skeeter lit plumb on th' notch o' my hine sight jest as I pulled, er they'd a be'n another good Injun—you bet!" But Connie shook his head.

"We'll take him with us. I want some information, and I guess Ick Far can make him talk."

"Ye're th' doctor," the man replied, with reluctance, as they approached the wounded Indian, who had sagged against an upstanding rock.

"We won't need to tie that hand," grinned Toad, pointing to the Indian's right arm which dangled loosely from the shoulder. "Come along ye murderin' houn'!" he cried jerking the savage to his feet. "An' no foolin', neither." As he talked, he produced a stout caribou hide thong, which he knotted skilfully about the Indian's good wrist, and deftly inserted a short stick into the knot. "Guess this here little persuader'll break ye to lead all right," he remarked, as the captive flinched under the pain of a tentative twist of the stick. "Hullo! There's our frien' with his blanket!"

"Let's hike, then," urged Connie, stooping to recover the cartridges from the body of the dead Indian. "Bring the rifles," he ordered. "We may need 'em."

When the three reached the village with their prisoner, the Brushwoods could scarcely be restrained from meting out swift vengeance upon him—five members of the tribe having been killed and a half-dozen wounded during the first attack.

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But Connie stood firm for the protection of his captive, whom he turned over to Ick Far for examination. Two hours later the scout reported:

“‘Soapy’ White, she ver’ bad mans—*hyas kultus*. She sen’ runner to de Moosehead. Say: ‘De Brushwood got um plent’ skin hol’ over from las’ weenter.’ Say: ‘Com’ an’ tak’ de skin an’ run de Brushwood ’cross de montaine, an’ tak’ de village. Ver’ mooch game—ver’ mooch fur where de Brushwood hunt.’ Say: ‘She giv’ de Moosehead plent’ firewater.’

“De Moosehead she hav’ ver’ bad year. Too mooch no rabbit—too mooch no feesh—too mooch no fur. Com’ ’cross de montaine for run de Brushwood out an’ keel heem. ‘Soapy,’ White, she giv’ de Moosehead plent’ firewater—plent’ shell. He say de Brushwood don’ trade wit’ heem no more—go down Yukon, trade on de A. C. store—das w’y ‘Soapy’ White, she don’ lak’ de Brushwood no more.”

“I’ll fix *him!*” exclaimed Connie, with blazing eyes. “But, first, let’s see how we stand here.”

A hurried inspection of the barricade showed

that, properly manned, it would prove a very effective fort—constructed as it was, of poles, and rocks, and newly-fallen trees. The fighting force Connie counted to be nineteen, exclusive of the women, children, and old men.

The captured Indian said there had been fifty of his own tribe, but that several had been drowned in the river after drinking liberally of "Soapy" White's liquor, and several more killed and wounded in the first attack on the village.

"They've got us at least two to one," said Connie, "but we'll hold 'em off! We've got the fort!"

"Besides, an' accordin' to which," interrupted Toad Jones, "we got the best end of it—they's twict as many fer us to shoot at. Ye kin hit 'bout forty men a heap easier'n what ye kin twenty er nineteen."

"'Cordin' to how the grub holds out," said Tex Gordon. "I reckon we kin slip a man down the trail at night fer water. But, *grub*—that's the main thing!" The man's words were cut short by a loud cry from the front—a cry that brought the whole force of defenders to the barricade with a rush. And then—a wild chorus of yells and

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savage whoops from beyond the barrier—the crash and blaze of many rifles, and the nasty spat and thud of bullets striking close.

*The Mooseheads were charging!*



## CHAPTER VIII

### IN THE NICK OF TIME

FROM his position at a wide loophole, low down near the centre of the barricade, Connie Morgan could see the yelling, leaping figures as they sprang straight toward him across the clearing, firing as they ran. Mechanically, the boy worked the lever of his carbine, sighting and firing as in a dream. Above the crash and din of the rifles and the war-whoops of the painted savages, other sounds broke upon his ears—sharp, high-pitched shrieks of pain—the singing whine of bullets—the heavy breathing of Toad Jones, who had climbed to the top of the barricade almost directly above him—the defiant roars of Tex Gordon, who was keeping two rifles hot while an old man loaded. On came the Mooseheads. Connie sighted and fired, first at one painted form and then at another—the whole clearing seemed alive with howling fiends who advanced in short rushes, dodging now behind

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a tree-stump, now dropping to one knee and firing, so that the little puffs of blue smoke blurred the hideous distinctness of gaping mouths and glaring eyeballs. Many were stopped in their advance, some pitching forward to lie still and inert among the weeds, others leaping high in the air to fall into a grotesque crumpled mass while their rifles struck the rocks with the sharp ring of steel, and still others, pausing, staggered ahead, and sank slowly to the ground to load and fire weakly.

There was the sound of tearing wood. A sharp pain stung the boy's cheek, and the air seemed filled with flying chips. He put his hand to his face and tugged at a sliver the thickness of a lead pencil that protruded from his jaw. The sliver yielded, and warm blood tickled his neck as it trickled beneath his soft collar. A Brushwood staggered past, screaming and dragging his rifle. Connie jammed his magazine full and turned again to his loophole, whose edge was splintered and torn at the point where he had been sighting.

There was a dull, scrunching thud above him. A rifle slipped past, grazing his shoulder, and clattered on the rocks at his feet. The body of a man followed the rifle, sliding slowly down the

lodge-poles and tree-trunks of the barrier. It, too, stopped at his feet, where it lay with mouth open and a smallish blue hole over the left eye.

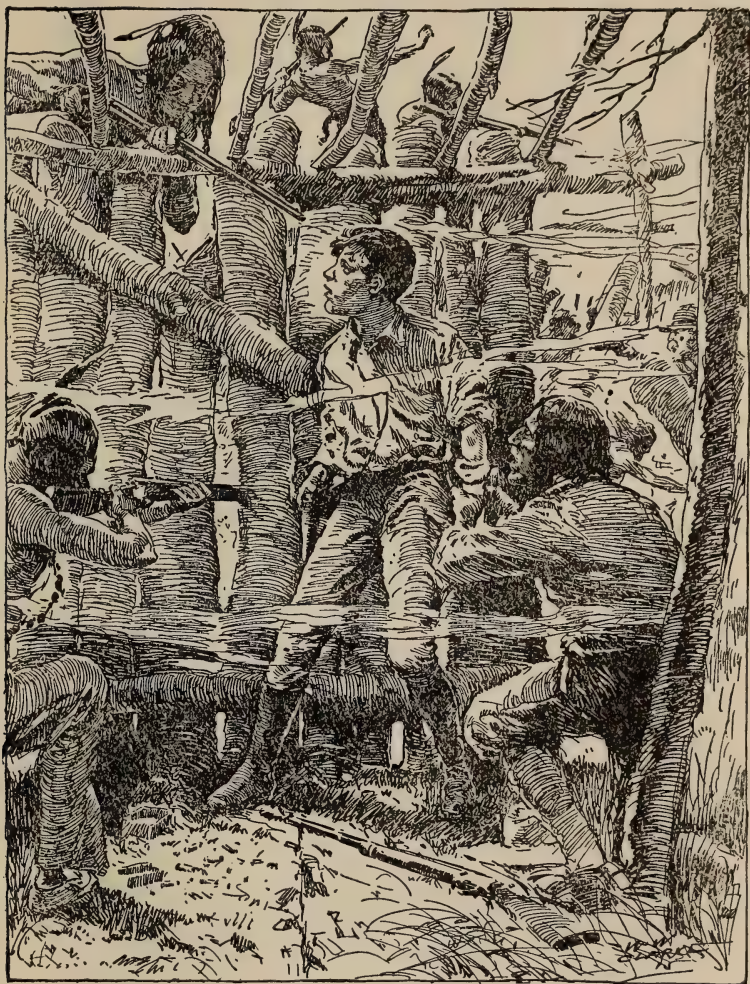
The man was Toad Jones.

Connie saw all this as he jerked at the lever of his carbine, pumping fresh shells into the chamber and firing through his loophole. Saw, also, other bodies lying close along the inside of the barricade. He was not afraid—was not even excited. The whole thing was unreal—like the climax of a great play. Only at first were his nerves out of control—when he had dodged at the whine of the bullets. He was firing faster, now—his carbine barrel was hot—it burned his fingers, and he spit on his hand. He picked up Toad Jones's rifle and fired till it was empty—then his own carbine was thrust into his hand, reloaded, and a squaw caught up the empty rifle. The yellow painted bodies of the Mooseheads were close to the barrier, now, and they pitched forward as he fired,—but, their places were taken by others—always, there were more.

The poles above him moved. He glanced upward into the glaring eyeballs of a hideously painted face. Connie could see the yellow teeth behind the lips drawn wide in a great oblong of ferocity. The

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Indian's body was outside the barrier, but one arm was inside. And the hand held a short carbine—held it like a pistol. The carbine went off. There was a deafening roar and the boy heard his own carbine clatter upon the rocks. His face burned and he choked as the pungent powder smoke bit into his lungs. Again he looked up. The face was still there. He tried to recover his carbine, but his arm seemed tied to his body. Then, from close behind him sounded another loud report, the painted face with its ferocious grin disappeared, and beyond the barricade a heavy body thumped upon the ground. Ick Far stood at his side with Toad Jones's rifle in his hand. He dropped the rifle and, jerking the knife from his belt, slashed the sleeve from Connie's jacket and shirt. There was blood on the white skin of his arm—the arm that wouldn't move. The boy felt no pain, only a restful numbness, and he watched with interest while the scout applied a rude tourniquet. He glanced toward the barricade. A face leered at the splintered loophole, and the muzzle of an old smooth-bore appeared. Automatically, Connie reached for his revolver and fired point-blank into the face at a distance



As Ick Far applied a rude tourniquet, Connie glanced up. A face leered over the barricade and the muzzle of an old smooth-bore appeared.



of two feet. The face disappeared. The black muzzle of the smooth-bore veered sharply upward and rocked to a standstill. Then, Ick Far was shooting again, and Connie was firing his service revolver at heads on top of the barricade. There were painted bodies now, among the others inside the barrier.

An aged squaw, with a face withered and drawn, like a sun-dried moccasin, pulled the smooth-bore, muzzle first, through the loophole. She raised the butt to her shoulder, jerked the barrel upward toward a painted figure that straddled the barricade, and pulled the trigger. There was a report like the roar of a cannon. The recoil flattened the squaw among the rocks. The painted figure rocked to and fro, sagged sidewise, and slithered slowly toward the ground. The foot caught at the ankle in a crotch, and the Indian hung head downward, with grotesquely twitching limbs and wide-staring eyes.

Upon the ground the old squaw laughed—a horrid, cackling laugh—and Connie shuddered.

His revolver was empty and a wounded Brushwood reloaded it for him. But he could see no more faces above the barricade. He heard loud



yells of triumph. Tex Gordon, with a strip of blanket bound tightly about his head, rushed up.

"They've quit! They've quit, kid! Look at 'em run!" Connie peered through the loophole and saw the half-naked forms running toward the timber across the clearing. The battle for that day was won!

The sun had long set before the full extent of the fierce onslaught was ascertained. Thanks to the barricade, the defenders of the village, although outnumbered fully two to one, had not fared nearly so badly as the attacking party, which had retreated, leaving more than half its number dead or wounded upon the ground. The loss within the barricade, however, was serious. Seven dead, including Toad Jones, who had climbed recklessly to the top of the barrier, and whose rifle had spoken to purpose during the earlier moments of the fray. Of the living, only Ick Far and three others had escaped without a scratch, while four were so badly wounded as to be incapable of further action. This left only eight of the original fighting force, but to offset the loss, fifteen squaws clamoured for a place on the firing line, and so eagerly and efficiently did they throw themselves

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into the work of preparing food, burying the dead, strengthening the defences, and cleaning the rifles, that Connie felt extremely hopeful for the future.

When Tex Gordon and Ick Far had bound up his wounded arm, the boy called a council. It was the unanimous opinion that the Mooseheads would not risk another charge. Their losses could only be estimated as Connie forbade any one to venture beyond the barricade. An Indian, like a rattlesnake, is never dead till he is good and dead, and many a man has been treacherously murdered while endeavouring to aid a wounded enemy.

The gravest danger that confronted the small garrison was the shortage of provisions. Figuring only one meal a day, Connie and Tex saw that their slender stock could last but four days—five at the most. Water, the Brushwoods assured them, could be procured by lowering a bucket on a line to the creek from a projecting ledge—but food they must have.

The small amount hastily commandeered from "Soapy" White's stock had been *cached* with the canoe, and Tex Gordon volunteered to slip out with a couple of Indians under cover of darkness and recover it. To this Connie reluctantly con-

sented, but it would only stave off the inevitable for one day.

"They'll try to starve us out," Connie said. "We've got to get word to Mayo—Dan McKeever's there, and Rickey."

"Me go!" cried Ick Far. "Me ketch um help. Seex sleeps, an' dem Moosehead, she weesh she stay on de black montaine."

"We c'n hold out six days—eight, on a pinch—can't we, kid?" said Tex Gordon, as he reached over and shook the scout's hand in a mighty grip. "Y'u're a *man*! Doggone my buttons! Y'u might be a Injun, but y'u're *white*—clean through to y'ur gizzard! Good-bye an' good luck to y'u—an' if ever any one tries to tell me they ain't no good Injuns, y'u bet I'll go to the floor with him till he yelps they're *all* good! An', jes' betwixt me an' y'u, they're th' orneriest sect they is—an' we know it," he added with a grin.

Connie also grasped the old scout's hand as he stepped onto the narrow foot trail and, although no word passed between them, each knew what was in the mind of the other.

Ick Far knew the mountains as few men ever know them. While he had never been there

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before, he knew instinctively that the steep divide at whose base he and Connie Morgan had stood in their search for a mail-route pass, would let him through somewhere in the vicinity of the village of the Yellow Knives—the Indians whose old chief, White Eagle, had sworn eternal friendship for the *Kloshe Tenas Tyee*, the good little chief whose medicine arrows had delivered his tribe from the hand of the Red Death.

The scout knew, also, that to undertake the trip to Mayo station would mean ten days at the very least before help could reach the besieged village. He knew that only two officers of the Mounted would be found at the station, and that the Mooseheads, crazy with drink and blood-lust, would stand under no authority, but would murder the uniformed officers as they would murder an obscure Indian. Of course, later, the tribe would suffer the consequences, but—later—well, Ick Far formed his own plan.

And, as the scout knew the mountains, he knew Indians. He knew that not only White Eagle, but every buck in the Yellow Knife village would welcome gladly the chance to show the *Kloshe Tenas Tyee* that they were his friends. He

knew that the Yellow Knives were friendly with the Mooseheads, and hated the Brushwoods, but he knew, also, that above any friendship for the Mooseheads was the bond, amounting almost to idolatry which attached them to Connie Morgan, the *Kloshe Tenas Tyee*.

Therefore, the scout turned northward from the mouth of the Lansing. In "Soapy" White's store a light burned and, unseen in the darkness, Ick Far paused and looked in at the window at the man who sat smoking upon his counter. He gripped tightly his carbine, and lightly his lean fingers played with the hilt of his sheath knife. But he pressed his lips tightly and hurried on into the dark. Up the river—up the small creek, he passed, travelling night and day. Up and over the steep divide, and down on the other side into a maze of creeks and feeders. Then, on the morning of the third day, he staggered into the village—straight into the lodge of White Eagle, where he told the chief his story—and collapsed upon the robes that covered the floor of the lodge.

It was toward evening of the sixth day after the scout's departure. The setting sun blazed red

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and angry above the peaks to the westward. Behind the barricade the little garrison, with set, tense faces, watched the preparation of the final move of the painted Mooseheads. The provisions had been exhausted. Tex Gordon and his two Indians had found the *cache* rifled, and the small stock on hand had been consumed the previous evening. Even this meagre store had not lasted as long as anticipated. Connie had been awakened upon the fourth night by a commotion near the commissary, which consisted of some skins thrown over the buckets of provisions. There was the sound of a struggle—a loud shriek—silence—a muffled splash from the creek-bed far below, and when the boy investigated, a huge squaw rose up from the ground beside the skins and pointed at her sheath knife—at an empty provision bucket—at the cliff's edge. And, in the morning, the garrison was short ~~one~~ defender. After that a guard was set, but the harm had been done, and now the Mooseheads were getting ready to rush the hungry little band. For six days they had showed themselves in the clearing to shoot random shots and draw the fire of the village. But the ruse failed because Connie gave orders to



save ammunition, and now, as the boy walked up and down the line of his grim fighters, his eyes were serious; for he knew that only five rounds of cartridges remained for each rifle, and that most of the rifles were in the hands of squaws whose zeal far outweighed their marksmanship.

The Mooseheads were forming, now—scattering out among the stumps of the clearing—yelling and exposing themselves to draw the fire at long range—but no shots were fired and, tiring of these tactics, the painted savages advanced. Only one hundred yards separated the nearest Indian from the barricade and Connie was about to give the order to fire, when, from the timber beyond the clearing, came a chorus of the wildest, most blood-curdling yells and whoops that ever assailed the ears of mortal man, and the next instant the whole clearing was filled with howling, shooting forms, and the crashing reports of their rifles drowned all other sounds. Connie stared in horror at what appeared to be the reinforcements of the enemy, while all about him the Brushwoods were dropping the rifles from their nerveless hands: “The Yellow Knives!” “The Yellow Knives!” “We die!” “*Nesika memaloose*—we die!” “They are the

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friends of the Mooseheads!" "We die!" "We die!"

An old crone started the death chant and in a moment it was taken up by every Brushwood behind the barricade. It rose and mingled in a weird phantasmagoria of horror with the war cry of the Yellow Knives, the crash of rifles, and the shrieks of the stricken Mooseheads. The events of the next few moments transpired with bewildering rapidity. Connie saw the Yellow Knives fall upon the surprised Mooseheads; saw the Mooseheads go down like grain before the reaper. He saw a few stragglers turn and dash for the forest, only to be pursued and stricken to the last man. Then, old White Eagle himself leaped over the barricade and picked Connie up in his arms—and his warriors followed, all yelling and howling and singing their wild chant of victory.

The death chant died on the lips of the Brushwoods and they gazed in stupid wonder into the faces of their ancient enemies—these wild, fierce enemies who had rushed to their aid upon the word of the small, white policeman.

Next day came Sergeant Dan McKeever and Corporal Rickey, and the prospectors who had

escaped across the mountains when the Mooseheads swept down the river. Came, also, Ick Far, from the village of the Yellow Knives, where he had lain in a heavy sleep while the hands of his huge silver watch crept twice around its dial.

The bodies of the Mooseheads were buried and the soldier-policemen shook warmly the hands of the Yellow Knives—and of Tex Gordon. Then, the prospectors returned to their diggings—and the Yellow Knives to their lodges beyond the divide.

"And, now," said Connie, as the officers sat around their camp-fire at the close of the gruesome day, "there is just one more thing to do. 'Soapy' White was at the bottom of all this. We've got him with the goods at last."

"He'll go to Stony Mountain fer seven hundred years!" growled McKeever.

"He'll be lucky if he ever *sees* Stony Mountain!" opined Rickey. But Ick Far said nothing, and continued to stare gloomily into the camp-fire's glowing coals.

Next morning the four officers stood beside the heap of ashes that had been the trading post of "Soapy" White. From a corner of the heap they

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dug a burned, charred *thing*, which they buried in a hole scooped in the gravel of the bar. "Soapy" White's score had been paid in full. But, whether by accident, by the hands of the Mooseheads who had returned for liquor during the days of the siege, by the avenging hand of the Yellow Knives as they swooped down the valley to the rescue of the *Kloshe Tenas Tyee*, or by the retributive hand of Ick Far, who followed in the space of a day, will never be known. For no investigation was conducted by the Mounted. And Ick Far, man of silence and mystery, stares gloomily into the distance—thinking his own thoughts.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE TEST

THE late evening twilight deepened as Special Constable Connie Morgan, of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, paused upon the edge of a tiny clearing to reconnoitre. Before him a small cabin of mud-chinked logs perched precariously between the steep, rock-studded shoulder of a mountain and the high-water line of a nameless feeder to the upper Stewart River. For a mile the boy had followed a well-defined trail that led from a point on the main river where a crude flatboat lay upon the bank ready for launching. He had expected to find a cabin—but, a cabin with curtains! Three hundred miles from the Yukon, in the very heart of the high outlands! This, he most certainly had *not* expected to find.

His glance strayed from the cabin to a rude sluice box in the bed of the stream, and back again to the cabin with its single chintz-curtained win-

dow. Smoke floated from the chimney, and Connie stepped boldly into the clearing. As he did so, the door opened and a little girl, a tiny tot of five, with bright golden hair, dashed laughing from the cabin, followed closely by a sturdy boy, perhaps a year her senior. Connie stared incredulously at the two children who had stopped short and were regarding him in wide-eyed wonder. He noticed that their eyes were blue and that neither showed the least sign of fear. "She's just like a picture," thought the boy, and smiled broadly at the two tots who stood before him.

"Hello, there!" he called, and then, remembering something long forgotten, he jerked the Stetson from his head and bowed. At the sound of his voice a woman appeared in the doorway. It came over Connie with a rush that she was quite the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, and that her eyes were blue, like the children's. His keen glance noted the look that came into the woman's eyes as they rested for a moment on his uniform—a look of extreme surprise—almost of fear. But the look passed, and the woman smiled.

Ever since he had ventured alone and friendless into the big North in search of his father, Connie



Morgan's lot had been cast among men. He knew men—women he did not know. And now, as he looked over the heads of the children into the face of the woman with the blue eyes, he felt, somehow, uncomfortably prominent; his hands and his feet seemed suddenly to have become ungainly things, whose appearance and movements were clumsy and ridiculous. He turned red.

"He—hello! I mean—How are you?" he stammered. And, again remembering his long-forgotten manners, he reached for his Stetson, and was surprised to find that he still held it in his hand. So, in lieu of raising it from his head, he wagged it uncertainly, and tried again:

"Good evening!"

The woman was still smiling. "Good evening," she answered, in a low voice. "Won't you come in?"

"Yes—yes'm—if you don't mind," answered the boy in confusion. "I'm Connie Morgan—Special Constable Morgan, of the Mounted," he confided. The woman nodded and drew back from the door as the boy entered, closely followed by the two children who continued to stare mutely at the visitor.

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"Why, you're just a little boy!" exclaimed the woman when she had lighted the tin bracket-lamp. Again Connie flushed.

"Yes'm; that is, I'm not so awful old."

"And you are out here in these mountains all alone?"

Connie avoided a direct answer. "That's nothing for us fellows. We run the country, you know."

The woman laughed. "But you are such a little fellow! Aren't you afraid?"

"No'm. You've got pretty babies." He nodded shyly toward the golden-haired little girl. "She looks like a calendar."

"Like a *what*?"

"Like the picture on the calendar the A. C. Company gave out. Didn't you get one?" His glance swept the walls of the room. The woman shook her head.

"We trade on the other side," she said, and suddenly stopped.

"The other side!" exclaimed the boy. "Over on the Mackenzie?" But the woman was noisily rattling pots and pans about the stove and did not answer. The little girl and boy had drawn close,

and Connie showed them his knife, his service revolver, and his belt of yellow cartridges.

"You don't live here alone, do you?" he asked, as the woman turned from the stove.

"No, my husband is a—a prospector. He will be home presently."

"There isn't much use fooling with a creek like this," the boy said earnestly. "The rock isn't right. He's just wasting his time. He's a *chechako*, isn't he?"

Again the woman smiled. "Yes," she answered, "he's a *chechako*. But he has done pretty well, so far."

"That's funny, 'cause the rock isn't right," answered Connie, and noticed that the woman shot him a keen glance as he played with the children.

A few minutes later the door opened and a man entered—and started in surprise as he saw a uniformed officer of the Mounted seated upon the floor industriously fashioning a toy wagon from a bit of board and some spools, while close against either knee, watching his every move, leaned the two children. Connie glanced up, and out of the tail of his eye saw the man and the woman exchange a peculiar glance. The woman spoke:

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"We have a visitor," she said. "He is Constable Morgan, of the Mounted; and he is having the best time with the children—he is only a boy himself."

Connie grinned and extended his hand. "Just dropped in to spend the evening," he said.

The man took the hand and nodded. "You're welcome," he answered gruffly. "Hank Dubro's my name—I'm a new settler in these parts."

"Supper is ready!" announced the woman, and Connie noticed that the man carefully lifted the children to their places and saw that his wife was seated before drawing up his own chair. Somehow, in spite of the man's gruffness, the boy liked him for that. When the meal was finished the man lifted the children down and then filled his pipe.

"Where you headin'?" he asked.

"Oh, just on special patrol," answered the boy. "Thought I'd cross over and have a look at the Indians on the head-waters of the Gravel River." Again he was conscious that a swift glance passed between the man and his wife.

"You headed up the wrong creek!" exclaimed the man. "You should have kept on up the Stewart till you struck Little Brown Bear. It's the

—one—two—three—it's the fourth creek above here. The pass to the Gravel is at the head of it."

Connie nodded. "Thanks," he said; "but I'm not so far out of my way, and I'm glad I came. It's worth a little extra work just to have a look at these kids."

The man laughed—a laugh of relief, the boy thought. "It sure is!" he agreed. "We just couldn't live without 'em, could we, Alice?"

"No, indeed!" the woman answered. "They're all the company I have when you are away."

"I prospect quite a bit, back in the hills," the man hastened to add. And again Connie nodded. He did not tell the man that he knew all about Little Brown Bear, nor that Sergeant Dan McKeever was even then pushing toward the pass, nor that officers of the Mounted were exploring each of the intervening creeks.

For word had come to B Division that a band of Athapascans who lived beyond the divide were being systematically supplied with liquor. And the fact that N Division was responsible for the Gravel River country but added zest to the work of the men of B.

Connie was not in the least surprised when he

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awoke the following morning to find that Hank Dubro was gone.

"He wanted to get an early start," explained the woman. "He is going away back in the hills."

After breakfast, Connie sauntered down and examined the sluice box. "I thought so," he muttered. "He is no prospector. This is just a blind—and a blamed clumsy one. He couldn't sluice a dump through that thing in a hundred years. There's no *cache* here, though. I guess I'll be on my way."

He returned to the cabin, thanked the woman for her hospitality, said good-bye to the children, who protested loud and lustily at thus losing their play-fellow, and started down the creek in the direction from which he had come. A few minutes later he crossed to the opposite side, and doubling back, came out on a faint trail well above the cabin. This trail, following the windings of the stream, grew rougher and steeper as it approached the divide. The keen eyes of the boy told him that some one had recently passed that way—and passed hurriedly. And he smiled as he saw, *cached* in a niche of rock, a light pick and a battered gold-pan—a pick and pan that he had noticed the



night before reposing behind the door of the "prospector's" cabin.

"It's too bad," Connie muttered, "that the woman and kids have got to be mixed up in this. He's a *fool* to think he can get away with it. We've got him—sure as shooting!" He remembered the peculiar look that had leaped into the woman's eyes at the sight of his uniform and the unguarded admission that they traded on the other side. Remembered, too, that she had said the man "had done pretty well, so far," when any one ought to know that the rock on that creek wasn't right for colour. And, at the thought of the man's sluice box, the boy grinned. "She knows what his game is, all right, and she's trying to shield him. . . . But, all the same, I wish I didn't know about those kids." He set his lips resolutely. "Duty is duty, though," he muttered, "and it's dirty business selling booze to the Indians." But, try as he would, the picture of a golden-haired little girl and a sturdy, blue-eyed boy kept recurring to his mind as he toiled up the steep trail.

The day was terrifically hot. The season had been an unusually dry one, and the August sun beat down mercilessly as the boy paused for breath

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on the ridge of a high shoulder. On three sides of him rolled a vast panorama of the hills. Jagged, rocky peaks reared their heads like icebergs above the timbered ridges that stretched in endless confusion, like the waves of a wind-tossed sea.

Connie's attention riveted upon a rising column of smoke, several miles to the southward. "A signal fire!" he cried, and then his brows drew together in a frown as a sudden shift in the wind whipped a dense cloud of heavy smoke around the spur of a high butte. "The timber's on fire!" And the next moment, along the lower edge of the smoke cloud, he caught the red glare of the high-flung flames! "The wind's changed! It's coming this way!" he cried. He was conscious of a low, dull roar. It was the angry voice of the fire-fiend! Instantly he cast about for a place of safety. Above him, a quarter of a mile away, a deep rock coulee reached upward, high above the timber-line. He turned and ran. Then suddenly he stopped in his tracks. Before his eyes rose the vision of a little girl with golden hair, and a sturdy, blue-eyed little boy, and the woman who had treated him kindly though she knew he was a police officer. Once more he glanced toward the fire, nearer, now, by

two or three ridges. The smoke cloud had reached him and cut off his view of the lower hills. Swiftly his brain calculated the chances. He glanced at his watch. "Two hours to climb up—I can make it down in half an hour." One glance, he gave, toward the rock coulee that meant safety; and one toward the leaping flames. The roar was loud, now, and incessant, and as he looked, a current of wind whirled the smoke pall upward, and he saw the long line of leaping flames that shot high above the timbered ridges.

A huge brown bear lumbered past, seeking the higher levels.

With set lips he sprang down the steep trail. The acrid smoke stung his eyes and bit into his throat and lungs as he breathed. The trail blurred, but he ran, as if by instinct, following its tortuous windings. In the narrow valley the smoke was not so thick and he breathed easier. It grew dark. He glanced upward. The sky was completely hidden by the dense smoke cloud that rolled and eddied above the ridges. The sun glared dull and red, like a splash of blood. A sickly, yellowish light filtered thinly into the valley, distorting outlines. Connie tore the pack from his shoulders and threw

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it into the bush as he ran. He fancied he could hear the crackle of flames above the hoarse roar of the fire. The smoke thickened until the air of the valley became almost unbreathable, like the air of the ridge he had left. He passed the place where the "prospector" had *cached* his pick and gold-pan. The cabin was not far, now. He dashed the smoke-stinging tears from his streaming eyes. His breath came in great sobs, and he coughed the smoke from his lungs. Suddenly a great wave of heat all but overpowered him. The mountain that formed the south wall of the valley was a solid mass of fire. The crackling of flames was real, now. It was everywhere. Great flaring sheets detached themselves, and hurtled through the air high above him. Pockets of gas exploded into red flame and tore great rifts in the writhing smoke cloud. The heat was intense. Gasping for air, Connie ran on, the sweat streaming from every pore. His blouse smoked, and he slapped at his shoulder. The flames had leaped the valley and already the north wall was ablaze. Even the scrub of the bottom was burning in places. The boy dashed into the clearing and crossed at a bound to the door of the cabin.

It was empty! He called loudly. His voice cracked, and he coughed. He breathed more freely; the smoke had not yet penetrated to the interior of the cabin, and the roof sheltered him from the intense heat of the curtain of fire. Tearing a blanket from the bed, he dashed to the creek. It was shallow, and he rolled in the water and saturated his blanket. Then, holding it above his head, he sprang down the trail to the Stewart. The low timber of the valley was blazing on both sides of the trail and steam rose from his soaked clothing and blanket. He rounded a turn and caught a glimpse of the water of the river. The next instant the water was blotted out. A cloud of dense black smoke rolled upon him, and before him appeared the red flare of flames. He was trapped! He turned back. . . . The whole valley was a mass of fire!

He pulled the blanket close about his head, turned again, and dashed straight into the flames at the point where, a moment before, he had sighted the water of the river. The fire bit into his wrists and hands as he gripped tightly his blanket. Only a few more steps, and the boy knew that he must go down. His knees weakened, and he felt dizzy.



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"Not till I have to, though!" he gasped, as he staggered on. "I'll never *lie down!* When I'm done, I'll *fall!* And when they find me, they'll know I went the limit. . . . A man's *got* to die



Dimly, before him he could see the river. The woman tugged frantically at the heavy scow, and the little boy pushed and pulled in a vain effort to help his mother.

game!" And then—a cool current of air fanned his tortured wrists, he hurled the blazing blanket from his head, and pitched headlong onto the gravel. He was out of the bush! Dimly, before him, he could see the river. Puny and thin, after the mighty roar of the fire, sounded in his ears the cry of a child. Instantly the boy was on his feet, staggering across the gravel bar, upon the outer edge of which he could make out blurred forms. He forgot his own suffering—forgot the pain of his



blistered wrists, his smarting eyes, his stinging throat and lungs. He knew vaguely that the woman was staring at him as she tugged frantically at the heavy scow—sobbing as she tugged. The little girl cried upon the gravel, and the little boy pushed and pulled, exerting his tiny strength to the utmost in a vain effort to help his mother.

Connie reached the boat and grasped the gunwale. Instantly the woman gripped his shoulder.

“Your blouse is on fire!” she screamed, and pointed to the water. “Jump in!” And Connie did jump in, and when he came up out of the cold water he felt wonderfully revived.

“Where is he—my husband?” cried the woman, when the boy was again at her side.

“He’s all right. He crossed the divide. He was a good three hours ahead of me, and I had almost reached the timber-line.”

It was but the work of a few moments, with the aid of a pole lever, to launch the boat. They lifted the children in and pushed off—and just in time! For as the boat swung out into the current, Connie pointed toward the mouth of the creek, and as the woman looked she shuddered. The full force of the fire was roaring down the valley, and from its

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mouth flames shot across the gravel bar to its very edge. The valley had become a veritable furnace.

To the northward the fire roared and crackled, but toward the south-west, where the fast-floating scow was carrying them, nothing was visible upon the left bank but blackened stubs, and grey, smouldering ashes, with the smoke cloud drifting above them.

## CHAPTER X

### THE PRISONER

THE fire did not cross the Stewart, and after running down a few miles Connie beached the scow at the point where the officers had camped and left a *cache* before separating to take their respective routes to the head-waters of the Gravel.

"You followed him?" asked the woman, when they had got a light shelter tent up.

Connie nodded. "Yes'm. I hated to, on account of you and the kids, but—duty is duty. I'm sorry he is mixed up in it. Whisky running is dirty. I'm sorry for you, and them," he pointed to the children, who were industriously panning gravel in an empty bean tin. Again he surprised the peculiar look in the woman's eyes, but instantly it was gone.

"But you didn't catch him!" she cried.

"No'm. I didn't. But, the others will. There are five of us, and we each took a different route."

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"But, the fire! Maybe it caught them."

Connie shook his head. "No'm," he said, "they had plenty of time to get beyond the timber. They were north of me, and they didn't have to turn back."

"Why did you turn back?"

The boy looked at her in surprise. "Why, it was up to me to try to save you and the kids."

The woman's voice faltered: "But your orders were to—to arrest the——"

"Huh!" interrupted the boy, "I guess you don't know the Mounted!"

The woman turned her face swiftly away and Connie saw that she was crying.

The boy's burns were found not to be serious and the woman tenderly bound them up, and for the remainder of the day, while she rested, Connie played with the children.

Early next morning he made up a light pack and telling the woman to remain where she was until someone came he started up stream, following the bank.

"Where are you going?" she called.

"To find your husband, and tell him you are safe."

"Is that all?"

Connie glanced away. "No'm," he answered, "that is not all," and plunged into the bush.

He forded the river opposite the mouth of the valley that had contained the cabin, but so changed was it that he scarcely recognized the place. No green thing was visible along the whole south bank of the river. Mountain slopes covered with blackened stubs and grey ashes reared skyward, and long naked ridges showed where, the day before, all was the rich dark green of the timber. The whole landscape spoke desolation and ruin. He passed on up the creek and halted suddenly. Two men were digging frantically among the ruins of the cabin, which still smouldered sullenly. Near-by a rifle leaned against a rock. One of the men looked up. It was the "prospector," and Connie saw that his face was seamed by deep lines of suffering.

"I can't find even a trace of them," said the man, in a dull, toneless voice. "My poor wife—and the babies——"

"Not there, you can't!" smiled Connie.

"What do you mean?" The man leaped toward him, his eyes alight with a sudden hope. "Tell me! Speak, can't you!"

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The other man moved stealthily toward the rifle.

"Back up, there! Back away!" cried the boy, and stepping past the "prospector," he secured the gun. Then he answered the man who could scarce restrain his impatience:

"Your wife and the kids are safe and sound a couple of miles down the Stewart." The man's face went white. He groped for words. "And now," broke in Connie, "I've got to take you two along. You're my prisoners. I charge you with running liquor to the Indians."

"You'll take me where they are?" asked the "prospector." Connie nodded.

"Look-a here! What in thunder's th' meanin' o' this? What's th' game?" The other man was staring from Connie to the "propector" in bewilderment.

"You shut up!" commanded Dubro. "Another word out of you, and you'll wish you hadn't said it! You heard what the kid said, didn't you? Well, he talked like he meant it—the Mounted generally does." Then, turning to Connie, he added: "We're ready."

The boy pointed down the trail. "Hike!" he





"Back up, there!" cried Connie, and stepping past the  
 "Prospector," he secured the gun.

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said, and followed closely as the two men headed for the river.

Connie's position was far from an enviable one. All the way down the trail he thought deeply. The actions of the men perplexed him: the ready submission of the "prospector" to arrest, and the puzzled exclamation of the other. "I've got to keep my eyes open," he muttered. "I can stand guard over 'em one night—maybe two," he decided, grimly, "but, after that. . . . Well, some of the boys better hike back over the divide. I've got to sleep, sometime. Gee! I wish I'd taken the bracelets out of my pack before I ditched it. I could have 'cross-toggled' 'em and slept like a log."

No matter with what suspicion Connie viewed the "prospector's" submission to arrest, his affection for his wife and children was genuinely unassumed, and as the boy noted the warmth of their reunion, a hope entered his mind that, out of gratitude for their deliverance, the man might consent to remain a willing prisoner until the return of the officers. He was evidently the leader of the gang; at least, he had spoken with authority when the other man had seemed on the point of resisting

arrest. But at the very first words of the woman that reached his ears he dismissed the thought, for he suddenly realized that he had not only the two men to deal with but the woman also, and that her brain, in all probability, was the most resourceful of the three.

"Have you told him, Jack?" she asked, and the man smiled as he shook his head. "Well, you go right this minute and tell him or I will! He's the bravest and gamest little boy in the world! You should have seen him come staggering out of the woods with his blouse all on fire, and without waiting to put it out, start to help me launch the boat. And I never could have done it alone—Jackie, and I—could we, Jackie?" She caught up the youngster and covered his face with kisses.

"Big boat!" the little fellow cried, and pointed toward the scow, partially drawn onto the bank. The man laughed aloud.

"All right, I'll tell him." He motioned to Connie, who drew nearer. "It's kind of worrying you, ain't it, kid, to figure out how you are going to hold us till your pals come?"

Connie met his smile with a level stare. "Not a bit," he prevaricated; "I could hold a dozen like

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you." He glanced significantly toward the service revolver that dangled in its holster. The man still smiled.

"But, you've got to sleep. Suppose the others don't get back for three or four days?"

"They'll be here today, or tomorrow at the latest," answered the boy.

"Maybe they will, and maybe they won't. That gang may keep them busy for a couple of days. I have an idea they're bad actors."

It was Connie's turn to smile. "Oh, you have an idea, have you? Well, you ought to know."

"Yes, I ought to, but I don't—that is, not all of them. He paused and Connie waited for him to proceed. "Look here, kid, who do you think I am?"

Connie shook his head. "Search me! You *said* you are Hank Dubro. I am *guessing* that you are the boss of the whisky-runners. I took a look at your sluice—so I *know* you're no prospector."

The woman laughed, and the other man turned his scowling face toward the group. "Tell him!" she urged.

"I'll admit, kid, the name was a fake, and so was the prospector bluff. I never worked in the gold

country before, and I was afraid that sluice wouldn't stand inspection. In real life I'm Inspector Jack Cartwright, of N Division, working out of Fort Simpson."

Connie snickered. "Guess again! Surely, you aren't just an Inspector! Why, I thought you were the Commissioner, or at least, a Superintendent!" The man ignored the sarcasm.

"I've been on this case for six months. There are three of us working together; the others are over on the Gravel. We wanted to slip one over on B Division and, because I was satisfied all the contraband wasn't coming in from our side, I crossed the divide and located on the creek, yonder. My wife always has wanted to get a taste of the big outdoors, and I've always promised to take her, so when we got the cabin rolled up we brought her over from Fort Simpson. She's only been here two months—but I guess she's had enough."

"Yes, indeed!" interrupted the woman. "And more than enough!" The man continued: "We figured that if we could catch some of the gang with the goods, on your side of the divide, we'd have the laugh on you. We didn't know that B Division had got wind of this job, and when you came along



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the other night, I figured you weren't alone, so I jumped out early to close down on the gang over on our side before you B Division fellows could beat us to it and turn the tables on us. Some of 'em must have beat me across, though, because this specimen, here, came tearing over the divide like something real was after him. I gathered him in—and then the fire came. All I could think of, then, were my wife and the babies down there alone. I thought of you, but I figured you'd be almost as far on your way as I was on mine—and I was cut off from the first. No one will ever know what a night I spent there on the rocks above the burned timber, waiting for the ashes to cool, and standing guard over my prisoner. Maybe you can get some idea, when I tell you that my brightest hope was that they had managed to reach the river. I knew the scow was too heavy for her to put into the water, and I knew she couldn't make it across the ford with the babies—even if she found it. But, drowning is a heap easier than burning—I hoped they would drown. As soon as it was light enough, we hit down through the ashes—and they weren't any too cool—nor the rocks, either." He extended a boot scorched and cracked to



bursting. "We reached the ruins of the cabin and—well, you know the rest."

Connie nodded. "Yes, I know the rest," he answered. "And, of course, I know you are no prospector." The man grinned, and the boy continued: "And, of course I know you are a whisky-runner and a mighty slick one, too. You put up a good bluff. You've got brains, but just let me tell you something, Mr. Prospector, or Dubro, or Inspector, or whatever you call yourself, you haven't got *all* the brains, and if I were to believe your yarn, you sure would have the laugh on B Division. If I turned you loose, Dan McKeever and Rickey never would get through kidding me! And wouldn't the Superintendent be proud of me?" Connie laughed aloud.

"But, kid, I *am* Inspector Cartwright! I've given it to you straight! Haven't I, Alice?"

The woman nodded. "Yes, indeed! Every word of it is true."

"I'm sorry you're mixed up in this, ma'm," said the boy, gravely. "I don't blame you for trying to help him—I would, too, in your place—but, it won't work."

"Look here, kid," broke in the man, and moving

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closer whispered earnestly into Connie's ear. The boy shook his head.

"You know a lot about the inside, all right. I guess you've been in the service, some time or other." His voice hardened. "And so much more shame to you for turning crook, too. But, your story is too thin!" He glanced at the man's clothing. "Funny kind of uniform they wear in N Division, isn't it?"

"You don't expect a man to pose as a prospector in a scarlet tunic and a 'pill-box,' do you?"

"Don't expect one to pose as a prospector with a chicken-coop for a sluice, either. Where's your service outfit?"

"Burnt up!"

"Hard luck!" exclaimed Connie, with mock sympathy. "I suppose they furnish N Division with Marlin rifles, too?" He glanced toward the captured gun.

The man flushed. "Constable Morgan, as your superior, I order you to release me from restraint! We should be working together to round up the rest of the gang, instead of hanging around camp doing nothing!"

"Don't worry! Your gang is prob'ly rounded up by this time."

"And B Division will get the credit!"

"Too bad!"

"You said the boys never would get through kidding you, if you turned me loose—I tell you, it won't be a patching to the way they'll kid you, when they find you've held me prisoner."

Connie interrupted with a laugh. "You're some bluffer, old hand. But, even if you are telling the truth, I guess the kidding will be the other way around—'specially, if B Division makes those arrests. What'll your report look like?"

The man was plainly annoyed. "Once for all, I order you to release me!"

"And once for all, I order you to shut up! I don't take orders from my prisoners. And, besides, prisoners do the work in my camp. You were kicking about hanging around with nothing to do. Get busy, now, and cook dinner! Here, you!" he called to the other man, "make you a wedge, and unravel these old socks, and pound the yarn into the cracks of that scow till she's tight. Come on, kiddies," he smiled at the two youngsters, "I guess you're my prisoners, too. I'll show you

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how to make a water wheel, while we watch 'em work."

The "prospector" glanced at his wife in dismay. But the corners of her mouth were twitching, and she laid a hand on his arm.

"The boy is right, Jack. Come on—be game! You fetch the wood and water, and build the fire, and I'll cook dinner."

And thus it was that a half-hour later, when Sergeant McKeever, and Corporal Rickey, and Constable Emmons, and Ick Far marched into camp escorting five manacled prisoners, they found a whisky-runner caulking a scow, and an Inspector of the Mounted and his wife preparing the noonday meal, while Special Constable Connie Morgan sat on the gravel and supervised the proceedings while he showed two round-eyed, and very much interested children how to build a water wheel out of a few round sticks and an old tin can.

For the "prospector" really was Inspector Jack Cartwright. McKeever had served with him in D Division, and Rickey in F. And when the roars of laughter that followed the recital had subsided, Inspector Cartwright stepped to Connie's side and

threw his arm about him, and the boy felt the grip of the strong fingers upon his shoulder.

“You’re all right, son! The joke’s on me—but, laying the joke aside, you’ve got a head that’s a credit to the service. And as for your nerve—the real *courage*, that shows what stuff a man’s made of—the *big test* that comes sometimes to some men—I know you must have been mighty close to the timber-line, son, yesterday morning. You could have saved yourself, sure. And, instead—you turned back! You took a long chance in the face of the worst death of all for them. That’s the kind of thing, son, that men are remembered for. It’s above gold, above power, above fame—this big test of a man is. And you have stood the test, son—the test by fire.”

## CHAPTER XI

### NOTORIOUS BISHOP

IN the barracks of B Division, R. N. W. M. P., a dozen non-commissioned officers and constables looked up from the polishing of kits as the Superintendent entered, saluted, and awaited the accustomed tug at the grey military moustache with which the commanding officer invariably introduced a subject.

"It looks as though we are going to have a live one on our hands," began the Superintendent. "You remember a month ago Stony Mountain reported the escape of Notorious Bishop—climbed to the roof through a scuttle—must have had wings, for they never found how he reached the ground. And now comes the report that he crossed the Mackenzie above Fort Simpson. Didn't dare risk a dash for the States, I suppose, and thought he would leave Canada by way of Alaska. The chances are, if he has succeeded in



reaching a point above Fort Simpson, N Division won't pick him up, so it's up to us. He must never cross the Yukon. If it were anybody but Notorious Bishop I would detail a man or two to watch the passes, Bonnet Plume and Gravel River, and notify Fort Selkirk and Lapierre House, and let it go at that, but Notorious Bishop never does the obvious. I'm going to string a dozen men through the mountains, because if there is a strip of range that looks absolutely impassable, that's right where Notorious Bishop will cross." The Superintendent laid a small packet upon the reading table. "Better look over these photographs and descriptions," he advised, "and report for assignments in an hour."

As the commanding officer left the room constables and non-coms crowded about the table, and Special Constable Connie Morgan, who had been playing checkers with Sergeant Dan McKeever, rose to join them. The Sergeant, who had shown no interest in the documents, smiled into the boy's face.

"Set down, son," he said. "This ain't your job."

"Why not?" asked the boy, "and why aren't you taking a squint at those pictures?"

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McKeever laughed: "Well, in the first place," he answered, "they don't send rookies after men like Notorious Bishop. He'd eat you up in two bites. In the second place, I don't need to look at no pictures nor no descriptions, neither, 'cause I'm the little lad that run Notorious down. Five years ago, it was, down on Bow River. An', believe me! I knew I'd been somewheres when I done it!"

"What did he do?" asked Connie.

"Do! Why take it first an' last, Notorious done everything the books says not to. But it was in his getaways he showed his real class. That's how he got his name. Wasn't satisfied with just gettin' away. Always had to add a few flourishes. It got so, I don't believe Notorious would of *snuck* away if he got the chance. One time he jumped off the middle of a sixty-foot trestle into the Saskatchewan. Another time he rode his horse full tilt over a twenty-foot cut-bank, when five of us thought sure we had him cornered, an' got off horse and all, acrost Milk River into Montana. Another time, when Corporal Ross was crowdin' him pretty close down in the Cypress Hills, he slipped up on the Corporal's camp one night, tied

him up an' borrowed his whole outfit, uniform an' all. He rode the Corporal's mount till it dropped an' then stopped at a ranch on French Creek, requisitioned the best horse in the corral, an' got acrost the line. A week later he sent the outfit back by a Swede along with a note of thanks.

"But all that ain't a patchin' to the stunt he pulled down on the C. P. R. Inspector Rooney an' a couple of constables rounded him up onct in some little town—Blairmore or Cowley maybe. It happened that a freight train had pulled onto the sidin' to let the Imperial Limited by, an' Notorious was makin' his stand amongst the freight cars. The little town, whatever it was, wasn't a stoppin' place for the Limited an' directly she showed up down the track runnin' full tilt. Somehow, Notorious managed to cut the engine off that freight on the side-track. Quite a crowd had collected to see the boys gather Notorious in, an' when they crowded back to watch the Limited go by, Notorious he lets out a yell like a Comanche, jumps onto the freight engine an' pulls her wide open. Rooney says the engine started so quick it never took the switch, but jumped plumb over

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onto the main track an' went a-roarin' off ahead of the Limited that was comin' fifty miles an hour, not a quarter of a mile away. Well, they stopped the Limited, cut her engine off, an' Rooney an' his constables took out after Notorious. That freight engine wasn't no slow-crawlin' bug when she was wide open. All they could see ahead was a black smudge." McKeever paused, grinning while several of the constables and non-coms who knew of the Sergeant's first-hand acquaintance with the outlaw, crowded about and were listening to the narrative. And Rickey, who had also chased Notorious on more than one occasion, cut in with an observation:

"Yes, and he whistles *Yankee Doodle*, blast him!"

McKeever laughed aloud. "I was comin' to that," he said. "Notorious is a Yankee, an' Rooney swears when that engine had got plumb out of sight down the track, an' them a-followin' so fast the telegraph poles looked like the teeth of a fine-toothed comb, Notorious was playin' *Yankee Doodle* on the whistle. That might be true, and again it mightn't—it ain't in the report. But, believe me, if a man *can* play *Yankee Doodle* on

an engine whistle, Notorious done it! That's his way."

"Did they catch him?" asked Connie, who had listened wide-eyed.

"Catch him!" snorted McKeever. "I don't believe they got anyways close to him, 'cause right then he pulled the most spectacular stunt of his whole notorious career. He waited till he got amongst the foothills an' stopped his engine, then he threw her wide open on the reverse an' jumped off. Rooney says he hopes he'll never see another sight like that. With the passenger engine a-tearin' along better than sixty miles an hour, they rounded a curve an' there, down a two-mile stretch of track, straight at 'em come that freight engine."

"Did it hit 'em?" asked Connie, excitedly.

"Hit 'em!" roared McKeever. "Ain't I just got through tellin' that Rooney turned in his report? Well, he wouldn't, if that engine had hit 'em. They managed to stop their engine, an' take to the brush just before the two engines hit. They sure mussed up the right of way. Rooney says there wasn't a piece left big enough but what a section crew loaded 'em by hand on a flat car."

"Let's see his picture," said Connie, and Rickey

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extended a bunch of photographs which he held in his hand.

"Pay your money an' take your pick," grinned the Corporal. "He never shows twice alike. The only thing you can really *tell* him by, they can't photograph—he whistles *Yankee Doodle*."

Connie scrutinized the pictures closely. He saw at a glance that Rickey had spoken the truth. No two pictures showed the same likeness.

"How did you catch him at last, Dan?" he asked.

"Who me?" winked the modest McKeever. "Why, I—I just surrounded him." And the boy joined in the laugh that followed, for he knew that here was a story he must hear from other lips. Big Sergeant Dan McKeever never boasted of his own exploits.

An hour later, Connie stood with the others awaiting assignment. In spite of Big Dan's prediction that they wouldn't detail a rookie to capture Notorious Bishop, a hope lingered in the boy's mind that possibly the Superintendent might pick him for the job. He had said a dozen men would be detailed. "A fellow ought to stand a pretty good show out of a dozen," muttered the



boy, as he took his place at the end of the line, and with chest thrown out, glanced eagerly into the face of the Superintendent whose grey eyes twinkled as he noticed that the boy's service hat was pinched into its very tallest peak, and that his boot heels missed the floor by a good two inches—noted also that the youngster had taken up his position beside Constable Peters, who was the shortest man in B Division, and that even as he stood on tiptoe the peak of the boy's service hat did not show very much above Constable Peters's shoulder.

“For special detail to patrol the divide in search of one Notorious Bishop,” the Superintendent was saying, “McKeever, . . . Rickey, . . .” Name after name was called, and as the list grew the boy's hopes sank. Even Constable Peters was mentioned and Connie winked hard as he realized the list was closed. Again the Superintendent was speaking: “For special detail to take census of Indians on the head-waters of the McQuesten, Special Constable Morgan, with Ick Far, interpreter.”

The assignments were over. The men crowded into the barracks while Connie Morgan passed

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around to the dog corral, and ten minutes later, Dan McKeever paused at the sound of a small voice and peered over into the corral where the boy sat on the ground, surrounded by his ten great *malamutes*. "That's the trouble with being just a boy," Connie was explaining to McDougall's big leader, "here's Dan and Rickey and even that sawed-off Peters got some real work to do. And I got to go off and count a lot of greasy Indians! Well," he consoled himself, "that's better than no assignment at all, like some of 'em got. You bet, I'll hike up that river and I'll count those Indians the best they ever was counted—and don't you forget it!" Whereupon he fell to playfully thumping McDougall's great leader with both fists, and Dan McKeever passed on with a grin.

Counting the Indians on the upper McQuesten was not a very strenuous job and twenty days after their arrival upon the farther reaches of the river, Connie Morgan and Ick Far began the return journey. The McQuesten is a quick-water river, and as the canoe shot swiftly around the bend on the second day of the return trip, Connie, who was in the bow, saw at the edge of the scrub upon a long bar, a one-man camp where no camp had been



"That's the trouble with just being a boy," Connie explained to McDougall's big leader. "The others get real work to do, and I got to count a lot of greasy Indians."

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when they made the ascent of the river. The boy passed a swift signal and with a dexterous twist of the paddle Ick Far shot the canoe shoreward. Here, evidently, was an Indian who had been missed in the counting. Suddenly, just as the bow scraped the gravel, the boy's heart gave a great bound. Darkness had gathered and in the scrub near a tiny fire someone was whistling. The man then, was a white man, and *the air was Yankee Doodle!* With his heart in his throat, the boy glanced toward the west where the high peaks of the main divide of the Rockies loomed big and vast and mysterious in the lingering half-light of the afterglow. For he knew that somewhere among those peaks and passes lay twelve picked men—stern-faced—experienced. Men who were the very flower of the Mounted, and who were there for the express purpose of preventing one certain man from crossing that divide. And despite their vigilance—despite the best efforts of that grim parol, the man had crossed the divide! Notorious Bishop was upon the McQuesten and it was up to him, Special Constable Connie Morgan, to take into Dawson the man who had time and again flaunted his escapes in the face of the Mounted!

The boy stepped onto the gravel. "Dan said, that day on the river, that brains and nerve are worth more than beef in the service," he muttered. "They better be!" he added thoughtfully, with a glance toward his slender wrists. "'Cause I sure haven't got much *beef*."

The man evidently had not noted their approach for the strains of *Yankee Doodle* continued to sound from the scrub. The boy filled his lungs.

"Hello!" he called. *Yankee Doodle* ceased abruptly. There was a quick movement by the fire and a man stepped from the scrub with a rifle in his hand. Leaving Ick Far to draw up the canoe Connie advanced boldly toward the silent figure. "Hi!" he greeted, casually. "How they coming?"

Halting within a few feet of the other he noted the swift glance with which the man swept his uniform—a glance that strayed past him and rested upon the figure of Ick Far who was walking toward them from the direction of the river. Noted also, that if the sight of the uniform had in any way disconcerted the man he did not show it by so much as the flicker of an eyelash.

"Hello, kid," he smiled, "'pears like you're quite



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a ways from somewheres, ain't you? Where you headin'?"

"Dawson," answered Connie. "I'm Special Constable Morgan of the Mounted, and this is Ick Far. Ick is the best scout and interpreter in the service."

"Pleased to meet you," acknowledged the man, "an' bein' as it's comin' dark, you'd better camp here along with me till mornin'."

"Sure will," replied Connie. "We'll pack our blankets and grub from the canoe."

The stranger helped with the packing, and the three sat down to a supper of bacon and bannock and tea. "Come far?" asked the man at length.

"Uh-huh, pretty far," answered Connie, with a wave of his hand toward the mountains to the westward.

"What's the good word with the Mounted?" asked the man, casually. "Anythin' in p'tic'lar stirrin'?"

"Yes," answered the boy. "There's a big patrol out. They're strung along the divide for a couple of hundred miles to pick up a man called Notorious Bishop. He escaped from Stony Mountain about a month ago and we got the report that



he crossed the Mackenzie and was prob'ly heading for Alaska." While Connie talked the man laid aside his cup and plate and deliberately filled his pipe, and the boy noted with admiration that the hand which held the glowing brand to the bowl was as steady as a hand of stone. The man puffed at his pipe and tossed the brand back into the fire.

"This here party, Notorious—which did you say?"

"Bishop," supplied Connie.

"Yeh, Bishop. What for lookin' *hombre* is he? Would you know him if you seen him?"

"Sure I'd know him!" exclaimed the boy. "We've got his picture at headquarters and his description, too."

"I was over on the other side about a month back, myself. Was working some creeks along the Carcajo."

"Did you see anybody over there?" eagerly inquired the boy. "Any white men, I mean."

"Yeh, they was a couple or so. What did he look like, this here Notorious gent?"

"Medium height, light hair, blue eyes, smooth face, weight about one hundred and sixty, and two

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gold teeth," described the boy, glibly remembering one of the photographs taken five years before. A description that Connie knew could by no stretch of the imagination be said to fit the man before him. "Why, do you think you saw him?" he asked eagerly.

The man appeared to consider: "Well, let's see. There was a couple of free-traders, but them wasn't him 'cause one wore a black beard and one was about six foot. Then they was a prospector on a creek called Willow Bunch he was light-haired all right, but he didn't weigh no more'n a hundred an' twenty or thirty, he couldn't of be'n him, neither. That's all I seen except Injuns. If you fellows got all the passes watched 'taint likely he could of got acrost to this side, nohow."

"You bet he won't!" assented Connie. "He'll never get by. Why, all the good men of B Division are strung up there among the mountains!"

"An' what you doin' way down in here?" asked the man.

Connie grinned: "Who me? Oh, I don't count, I'm just hiking back to Dawson to report. You don't happen to be going down Dawson way, do you?" he added.

"Well, I do'no," answered the man. "I ain't had no luck on the McQuesten, an' I never had none acrost the divide. I was figurin' maybe I'd winter on some of these here creeks if I could strike a colour, and maybe I'd go on over into Alaska. This here country has been worked out though."

"Sure has," assented Connie, "and if you are going over to Alaska you had better make up your mind pretty quick. That is, unless you want to *mush* down the river. 'Cause the last boat leaves on the fifteenth of September, and it's about the first now."

"Third," corrected the man.

"Well, the third then. It will take a good week, and maybe more, to reach Dawson. There's plenty of room in our canoe, if you want to go along."

The man considered the proposition. "Well, I'll study about it an' let you know in the mornin'," he said at length. "Anyhow I'm obliged to you, whether I go 'long, or whether I don't."

"Suit yourself," replied Connie indifferently. "Guess we'd better roll in now. I want to get an early start."

## CHAPTER XII

### CONNIE PUTS ONE OVER

FOR a long time after Ick Far and the boy were asleep the man sat smoking by the fireside. His eyes sparkled with daring and time and again he smiled into the coals. Once or twice he pursed his lips to whistle, but with a glance toward the sleeping forms, grinned instead. As a matter of fact Notorious Bishop had been at his wit's end to know how to proceed. True to the Superintendent's prediction he had avoided the passes and crossed the divide at the head of a steep and almost inaccessible canyon; a proceeding by which he gained the Yukon country unobserved, but which, also, necessitated the abandonment of all his outfit except a very light pack which contained only the barest necessities. Furthermore, he was unfamiliar with the Yukon territory, and knew nothing of the patrols or the stations of the Mounted. He was proceeding, therefore, with the utmost

caution. The man was determined to outwit the Mounted, and cross the International Boundary into Alaska. But the details of his bold undertaking had not yet been fully worked out. Therefore, Connie's offer appealed to the man strongly. Not only would it afford a means of transportation but the adventure appealed to him. With the pick of B Division guarding the passes, the interior of the Yukon country was the safest place he could possibly be. And what a chance to put one over on his ancient enemies! To travel through the country as a guest of the Mounted, when from the boundary to the Arctic, and from Hudson Bay to the Pacific, every officer in the service was on the *qui vive* to effect his arrest!

Notorious Bishop grinned into the camp-fire. At the moment of the boy's offer he had decided to accept it, and it was only to avoid the appearance of eagerness that he delayed his answer until morning. He would play the adventure to the limit and later from some far-off point of safety, would write thanking the Mounted for its hospitality. The man knocked the ashes from his pipe, and as he drew his blanket over him, glanced across the fire at the sleeping boy.

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"Ain't you the cock-sure little rookie?" he muttered. "'Sure I'd know him,' he says. Gee whiz! I'd like to whistle *Yankee Doodle!*"

The next morning the camp was early astir and after breakfast while Connie was rolling his blankets, Notorious Bishop filled his pipe. "D'you say, Constable, that the last boat leaves for Alaska on the fifteenth?"

"Yes," answered the boy. "That's when she's due to leave. She always gets away by the seventeenth."

The man removed his Stetson, and thoughtfully scratched his head as his gaze travelled up and down the river. "Seems like a man can't do no good here," he mused. "You say you got room in your canoe?"

"Sure," answered Connie, "that is, if you don't pack too big an outfit."

Notorious Bishop laughed: "My outfit ain't hardly worth worryin' about. You see I hit the river a piece above here an' throwed together a raft, an' comin' around the bend yonder the raft run plumb square onto a rock. I managed to save my blankets an' one pack-sack an' the river took the rest. It's a lucky thing you happened along.



I just about made up my mind I'd have to hunt a tradin' post somewheres."

"You'd have had a long hunt," said Connie. "The nearest trading post is about fifty miles from here, and you'd have had to track-line all the way back."

"All right, Constable," the man replied, "if it ain't going to discommode you none I believe I'll just go on along with you and try my luck over in Alaska. It can't be no worse than it is here, nohow. I'm sure obliged to you for the lift, an' if anything turns up you'll find I ain't the one to forget it."

With his back to the man, Connie tightened the hitch of his bed-roll, and he grinned as he tugged at the rope. "You said something then, Mr. Notorious Bishop," he muttered to himself. "'Cause something sure is going to turn up and you can bet your boots you won't forget it, either!"

The trip down the McQuesten was uneventful enough. Notorious Bishop proved an actor of unusual ability. He played the part of a prospector so well that Connie himself would have been deceived had it not been for the fact that he had heard him whistle *Yankee Doodle*. Even with

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*Yankee Doodle* the boy was not quite sure of his man. It was possible, after all, that the man was a prospector. For, try as he would, Connie could trace no slightest resemblance between the features of his passenger and those of the photographs on file at headquarters. The chance word dropped by Corporal Rickey that Notorious Bishop was in the habit of whistling *Yankee Doodle* was the only clue to the man's identity. "'Course any one *could* whistle *Yankee Doodle*," thought the boy to himself as the canoe shot down toward the Yukon. "But way up here, somehow, the chances are they *wouldn't*. Anyway, I'm going to play safe. If he ain't Notorious Bishop, he can easily prove it, and if he is—Gee, won't Dan's eyes stick out! The Sarg said he'd eat me up in two bites. But I guess if he tries it he'll find out he's bit off more than he can chew."

During the days of the journey the man talked freely. His mind was evidently clear of any slightest suspicion that the boy was aware of his identity, and he whiled away the time with accounts of adventures in various parts of the world—adventures that made no mention of police, but included stories of the diamond mines of Africa, the sailing

of ships, and the wonders of far Cathay. Connie listened, wide-eyed to the stories, the while he noted that the man asked many guarded questions pertaining to the country—questions that any stranger might ask regarding settlements, trails, telegraph lines, and the customs inspection on boats. And at all times was he loud in his praise of the Mounted, and of their ability to preserve order throughout the vast territory under their jurisdiction. He even asked to be allowed to inspect the headquarters of B Division and to meet the commanding Superintendent. Connie marvelled at the man's audacity and promised to see what he could do toward the granting of his request.

The Stewart River was run without mishap and shortly after the canoe passed into the Yukon, the police launch *Aurora*, containing a Corporal and a Constable on river patrol, chugged close alongside. For a moment Connie was tempted to enlist the aid of the two officers in conveying his prisoner to Dawson. But at the thought of McKeever's words the boy's hand gripped tight upon his paddle.

"No, siree," he thought. "I've come this far alone, and I'm going to see it through." So when the boat drew alongside the boy merely saluted and

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joked a bit with the Constable, while Notorious Bishop, with all the assurance in the world, begged a pipe of tobacco from the Corporal. And the launch passed on and left the canoe to continue her way toward Dawson.

That night they camped at the little police post on Indian River where Notorious Bishop played checkers until far into the night with the Constable in charge while Connie looked on and wondered at the man's nerve. Next morning when they set out for Dawson, the Constable accompanied them to the river and waved them good-bye with a cordial invitation to the "prospector" to be sure and stop in whenever he passed that way—an invitation which Notorious Bishop laughingly accepted providing the Constable would brush up his checker game.

The buildings of Dawson were sighted long before sundown and Connie's heart thumped with suppressed excitement as the canoe beached close to the wharf where the *Sarah* was being loaded for her last trip down the river.

"Guess I'll just go over an' get my ticket while the gettin's good," said Notorious, as he shouldered his rifle, blankets, and pack-sack. "Come

on along, Constable," he invited, "an' I'll go on up to headquarters with you. I'd sure like to see what kind of a layout you've got up here." The man booked passage for Fort Yukon, and Connie accompanied him while he stowed his effects in his tiny cabin. Returning to the wharf they were informed that the boat was due to sail the following day.

"That sure suits me fine," said Notorious. "I've heard a lot about Dawson, an' my friend, the Constable, here, he's promised to show me 'round a bit." Then, turning to the boy. "All right, Constable, just you lead the way an' we'll start on our sight-seein' tour. You be the guide, and I'll pay the freight." He laughed boisterously and Connie noticed that his grey eyes were unusually bright. A sudden fear clutched his heart. Was it possible that in some way he had overplayed his game and that Notorious Bishop knew that he had been recognized? Was the man planning a spectacular dash for liberty? Or was his evident state of suppressed excitement occasioned by the fact that he was soon to be brought face to face with the Superintendent, himself, while the Superintendent's picked men were at that very moment

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scouring the mountains for him many miles to the westward?

The boy wondered whether the man really had the nerve to visit headquarters. He glanced swiftly into the grey eyes and decided he had. They were almost at the barracks now. Upon the wooden sidewalk of Front Street a couple of officers passed them with a cheery greeting for the boy and a casual glance at his companion. Connie found himself taxed to the utmost to conceal his excitement, and as they entered the barracks side by side the boy fancied the other must certainly hear the thumping of his heart. In the big room two or three men were polishing kits. Connie motioned his companion to a seat and hurried at once toward the office where he found the Superintendent seated behind his flat-top desk. He looked up as the boy entered and stood at attention.

"What, back already!" the commanding officer smiled as he glanced over the trim figure of his youngest constable. Connie saluted and advanced to the desk.

"Yes, sir," he answered, "here's my report." He extended the paper and as the officer took it he noticed that the small hand trembled.



"What's on your mind, son?" he asked.

"If you please, sir," stammered Connie, "can I report later?"

The Superintendent smiled: "A matter of importance?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," answered Connie, "but there's a man out here that says he wants to see you. Can I bring him in?"

"Who is he? What does he want?"

"Oh, he's—he says he's been prospecting up on the McQuesten. He's heard a lot about the Mounted, and he'd like to visit headquarters."

"All right, show him in," growled the Superintendent, fingering the report, "probably another one of those fellows that want to tell us how to run the country." And the Superintendent wondered whether he had seen a smile on Special Constable Morgan's lips as he hurried from the room.

In the barracks Connie found the prospector seated at the table between two constables. The man was glancing over some photographs which he held in his hand. They were photographs of Notorious Bishop, and the constables were eagerly detailing some of the man's spectacular adventures. The boy advanced toward the group, smiling.

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"He's the man I was telling you about."

The prospector nodded: "Seems to be a hard man to gather," he smiled, "if what these lads been tellin' me is true."

"Oh, I don't know," answered Connie, "I bet I could manage him."

And the prospector joined loudly in the laughter which followed.

"The Superintendent says he'll see you now," said Connie, and the man arose and followed toward the office. As the boy stepped aside to allow the other to pass out the door, he motioned swiftly to the two men at the table. The men arose and followed as Connie led the way to the office. The Superintendent glanced up as the prospector approached his desk. Connie saluted, and his right hand closed upon the butt of his service revolver.

"Superintendent," said the boy standing very straight and very alert, "I want to introduce—Notorious Bishop!"

The man whirled like a flash to stare squarely into the ugly black muzzle of the revolver. For just an instant he hesitated as if calculating his chance, and then with a shrug turned again to face

the Superintendent who was upon his feet staring incredulously from the man to the boy.

The prospector was the first to speak, and Connie marvelled at the consummate assurance of him as he smiled into the Superintendent's face.

"Kid's kind of had this feller on his mind, I guess, 'til it's turned his head," he said, with a wink.

"Yes," interrupted the boy, "I haven't had much else on my mind for more than a week. But it hasn't turned my head any—not so you could notice it! You thought you had me fooled, didn't you? You thought because I was a boy you could run another one of your whizzers, but you can't get away with it, this time—not with me you can't! We'll just hold you 'til Dan McKeever comes. He knows you, all right."

"McKeever!" cried the man in sudden alarm. "Why he belongs down on—." Suddenly he checked himself, and the Superintendent with a puzzled look motioned the two constables to the man's side. "This is an outrage!" stormed the prospector as he felt his arms seized from behind. "Who is McKeever? An' what's he got to do with it?" For an answer the Superintendent smiled.

"We will let him answer that question for him-

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self," he said. "Constable Morgan, if you will step out, I think you will find Sergeant McKeever in his bunk. He reported in a couple of hours ago for permission to push across into the Mackenzie Basin."

A moment later, Connie was shaking the big Sergeant's shoulder. "Hey, Dan," he called, "wake up!"

"What you want?" growled McKeever, sleepily opening his eyes.

"The Superintendent wants you over at the office to identify an acquaintance of yours."

"Who is it?" growled the Sergeant as he reached for his trousers.

"Oh, just a fellow by the name of Notorious Bishop I picked up about a week ago out in the hills," answered the boy with a great show of nonchalance.

"Notorious Bishop!" cried McKeever, staring into the boy's face. "What do you mean, Notorious Bishop? If Notorious Bishop is in this country he's over on the Mackenzie."

"Is he?" asked the boy with a grin, "you wait and see."

A few moments later, Dan McKeever entered

the office and stared wide-eyed into the face of the most wanted man in all Canada.

"Well I'll be—well I'll be *doggoned!*" he cried. "It's him! It's him, all right! For the love of Mike, kid, how did you do it?" He grabbed Connie by the arm.

"Who me?" grinned Connie, imitating to a nicety the tone in which McKeever had answered the same question, "Oh, I just *surrounded him*. He ain't hard to handle, if you know how. I just hung around and let him arrest himself, didn't I, Notorious?" And Notorious Bishop who saw that the game was up laughed sheepishly.

"I guess that's right, kid," he answered. "But you see, you're so pumb little that-a-way, it throwed me off. I figured the safest thing I could do was to come through the territory with an officer. An' it would of be'n, too. Didn't we pass seven or eight of 'em? Didn't I borrow tobacco off one of 'em, an' play checkers with 'em, an' talk to 'em without one of 'em spottin' me? Tell me, straight, Superintendent, would you of know'd me, yourself?"

The Superintendent smiled. "I'm afraid not," he admitted, with puckered brow.

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"What I can't figger," continued the prisoner, "is how the kid spotted me when all the others couldn't."

"Just a trick of the trade," smiled the boy, and the twinkle in his eye belied the innocence of his words as he continued: "The trouble with you is that you couldn't take a fellow at his word. When I told you to your face I would know Notorious Bishop if I saw him, didn't you *believe* me?"



## CHAPTER XIII

### THE TRAIL OF THE "DEMON'S HEART"

THE *tillicums* of the gold country still speak with bated breath of the "Demon's Heart," the great nugget that left its trail of ill-luck, misfortune, and death, from the Black Fork Kaskana to Dawson, and from Dawson to the divide—and beyond. The *tillicums* wonder how far beyond.

About hot stoves in far-away trading posts men ask each other if the great nugget is still working its harm among men. Has it found its way to the mint and been stamped into coins? Or, to the jeweler, and been fashioned into costly rings to encircle fair fingers? And if so, have the crucibles and the melting pots removed the bane? Or, will misfortune forever dog the footsteps of the women who wear the rings, and the men who possess the coins, stamped from the gold of the "Demon's Heart"?

But of all the *tillicums* in the land of the peaks

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and passes, only two know that the trail of the great nugget is ended. For Special Constable Connie Morgan of the Royal North-west Mounted Police prefers to speak of other things. And Ick Far, the leathern-faced, the imperturbable, speaks nothing at all, but sits in sphinx-like silence with his eyes fixed upon far things—thinking his own thoughts.

As the *June Altroff* sheered in toward the Dawson wharf, her stern wheel lashing the waters of the Yukon into white foam, the little knot of men who awaited her arrival were horrified by a dull roar and a sudden high-flung column of smoke and steam, as before their very eyes the little steamer disappeared from sight, leaving the surface of the Yukon strewn with a mass of white wreckage, and the struggling forms of men.

Five minutes later, the police launch *Aurora*, manned by Sergeant McKeever, Corporal Rickey, and Special Constable Connie Morgan, shot out from the bank and returned with the half-dozen survivors of the wreck.

It was during the investigation which followed, that the great nugget first came under the notice of the Mounted. In the Miners' and Marines' Hos-

pital the three officers who had accomplished the rescue, closely examined the surviving members of the crew of the ill-fated *June Altroff*. Neither the captain nor the chief engineer could throw any light whatever upon the cause of the accident. The engineer affirmed that the steam pressure had been well within the safety limit, and the captain testified as to the recent overhauling and inspection of his boilers.

"She jest up and nach'lly let go without no cause nor reason whatsumever," he concluded, and at the words a man in the adjoining cot, who had been frightfully scalded in the explosion, raised a bandaged hand and beckoned weakly to the officers. Connie and Dan McKeever bent over him.

"It's in my coat," he muttered thickly; "the thing that made the boat blow up."

"You mean a bomb?" cried McKeever.

"No—gold," muttered the man. "It's a nugget. One hundred an' four ounces, she weighs! An' she saps men's lives!" McKeever glanced significantly toward Connie who stood upon the other side of the cot. Interpreting the glance, the injured man continued, speaking with difficulty: "You think I'm out of my head, but I ain't.

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I'm a goner! I'm all burnin' up inside, an' my heart's on fire! But I tell you my head's clear! Tell 'em to bring my coat. It's sewed in the linin'."

An attendant handed McKeever a soggy mackinaw from which the river water still dripped to stand in little pools upon the floor. The coat sagged heavily upon one side, and as the Sergeant held it he noted that its weight far exceeded the weight of any water which the thick garment could possibly have absorbed. As Connie slit the lining with his knife, a heavy object thudded loudly upon the pine floor. Lifting the object to the bed, the boy unwound a wrapping of cloth. The next instant the officers, the hospital attendant, and the men upon the adjoining cots stared with bulging eyes upon a great nugget of gold that showed dull yellow against the grey of the blanket.

"It's streaked with red—an' it saps men's lives!" moaned the man in the cot as he sought to draw his bandaged body away from its fancied contact. Connie lifted the lump to examine it more closely. It was rudely heart-shaped in form, with one side rough as furnace slag, and the other ground smooth as velvet by the action of sand and

water. But its most peculiar feature was the band of a darker yellow, almost reddish cast, that appeared on the smooth surface and struck through to reappear on the opposite side.

"Where did you get it?" asked McKeever hoarsely. "An' what's it got to do with the blowin' up of the *June Altroff*?"

"Aye, what's it got to do?" shuddered the man in the cot, as he stared with horrified eyes at the huge nugget. "It got the Injun, an' it got Hans Anderson, an' me, an' them out there in the river—that went down with the boat an' never come up ag'in. What's it got to do with us all? An' why is it red, an' heart-shaped? It's ha'nted, that's why! It's demon gold——!"

"But where did you get it?" persisted McKeever. "An' who is the Injun, an' Hans Anderson?"

The man called for water and the attendant held a glass to his lips. "The Injun was just an Injun," he muttered dully, after a brief pause. "Hans Anderson found him dead in a wickiup on a crick an' in his hand he held that!" The man stared in strange fascination at the nugget as he talked. "An' he took it, an' buried the Injun. Hans

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Anderson was trappin' an' prospectin', an' he had a cabin on Black Fork Kaskana. My camp was ten miles above his'n. One day I paddles down to see about us runnin' in our winter's grub by canoe before the freeze-up. An' when I gets to his cabin there ain't no smoke comin' out the chimbly, an' I shoves open the door, an' there lays Hans Anderson in his bunk, an' a ragin' fever was on him, an' he talks wild an' delirious about a big nugget streaked with red. I done what I know'd how for him, an' bye 'n' bye he quieted down. 'Twas then he told me about the Injun. 'There's a curse,' he says, 'on the gold from a dead man's hand!' An' he showed me the nugget. 'It's got me,' he says, 'an' it'll get any one that owns it.' An' he wanted me to take it up to the crick an' bury it with the Injun. But I wouldn't, an' that night Hans Anderson died. I wanted him to give me the nugget, but he said it would bring me bad luck. An' he died with his fingers a-grippin' it tight.

"Him a-tellin' me that-a-way, 'bout takin' it from the hand of the dead Injun, an' then him a-dyin' like he done, when he was well an' hearty the last time I seen him, a few days before, it give me the creeps, an' had me plumb scairt of the red-



streaked nugget. I allowed I'd bury it with him. The next day I dug a grave an' I put Hans Anderson in it, with the nugget still clutched in his hand. An' then, jest as I give a last look, a shaft of sunlight struck down an' lit up the gold till it shined, an' glittered—" the man paused, shuddered, and moistened his lips with his tongue. "'The gold's got you! You're a fool!' I yells to myself out loud. 'Gold's gold! An' here's more of it in one lump than you ever seen or ever will see. Gold ain't nothin' but rock, or whatever it is. It can't do *him* no good, nor you no harm. An' it's as much yourn, now, as it was his'n when he took it from the Injun!' An' I reaches down and tears the chunk from his fingers, an' throws in the dirt, an' jumps into my canoe an' paddles for the big river. I sewed the nugget in the linin' of my coat. At Five Finger I caught the *June Altroff*, an'—an'—it's got me—like Hans Anderson said it would."

The scalded man died. And that same night occurred the fire that razed the Miners' and Marines' Hospital to the ground. By dint of much work and no little heroism the patients were all removed. In the official records the cause of the

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fire is given as a defective flue, but those who had looked upon the nugget and listened to the scalded man's story wonder. The hospital attendant, and the captain and the chief engineer of the *June Altroff* talked. And up and down the river, and among the far hills, the nugget became known as the "Demon's Heart," and men spoke in awed whispers of the ill-luck that followed its trail.

During the excitement incident to the fire, the nugget was forgotten. And though men searched and dug in the ruins for many days, no trace of it could be found in the ashes. Then, suddenly, it reappeared as mysteriously as it had vanished. This time in the possession of Nick Mullane, who affected scorn for its power for harm, and exhibited it in his store, where men flocked in numbers to gaze upon the misshapen talisman of ill omen. These men who came to gaze remained to buy, and Nick Mullane's business began suddenly to rival that of the A. C. Company.

But the man's prosperity was short-lived. No more does Nick Mullane scoff at the power of the nugget to work harm. And the men of the Yukon add one more milestone to the trail of the "Demon's Heart." For, between two days, the nugget dis-

appeared, and with it all the gold that had accrued by reason of Nick Mullane's sudden increase of business.

Nick Mullane appealed to the Mounted. And Sergeant Dan McKeever accompanied by Ick Far headed into the hills, following a three-man trail. On Burton Creek they buried a man, and at Hot Springs, another, and at Bonnet Plume Pass the trail of the third man was so completely lost among the rocks that even Ick Far could not follow it. And the "Demon's Heart" passed beyond the ken of the men of the Yukon.

But the *tillicums* still wonder what lies at the end of the trail.

"Afraid of ghosts?" asked the Superintendent commanding B Division, as Connie entered the office in answer to the summons of his chief, and stood at attention.

Connie smiled. "No, sir!" he answered. "That is, I don't think I am. I never saw one. I don't believe there are any. And if there aren't, I *couldn't* be afraid of 'em."

"Yes, but suppose there are," persisted the Superintendent with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, then I *wouldn't* be afraid. I guess if

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they're sensible ghosts they won't try any monkey business with the Mounted."

The officer laughed. "You'll do," he said. "Of course there are no such things as ghosts, but it's hard to make the Indians believe it. In fact, it's hard to make 'em believe anything a white man believes. Ordinarily I don't pay any attention to their yarns. But this case is a little different." He picked a paper from his desk. "Here's a letter that was brought in by a trapper yesterday. It's from MacFarland, chief trader at the Tilton Lake, H. B. C. Post:

"Superintendent commanding B Division,  
Royal North-west Mounted Police,  
Dawson, Y. T.

"Sir:

"I beg to call your attention to the fact that the Indians in the vicinity of Red Tail Lake have abandoned their hunting ground and have moved to the immediate vicinity of this post. They insist that a ghost or *tamahnawus* has taken possession of the Red Tail Lake country, and they refuse to go back until the police come and chase it away. These Indians have great respect for the Mounted, and if you can spare a man or two I think they can be persuaded to return without trouble. I am calling your atten-

tion to this matter because the Tilton Lake Indians are beginning to resent the invasion of their hunting grounds; and while there has been no open hostility, trouble may break out at any minute. Also, because the Red Tail Lake country is winter range for thousands of barren-ground caribou which are the main dependence of these people for meat, and if the Indians are not made to return to that section, the forthcoming cold weather will cause a great deal of suffering among them.

"I should have investigated this matter myself, but I am alone at the post, my clerk having gone outside with the brigade. I am, sir,

"Faithfully yours,

"T. J. MacFarland, chief trader,

"H. B. C. at Tilton Lake."

"So you see," said the Superintendent, "that it is up to us to straighten this business out. Your job will be to mush over there, shoo the ghost out of the woods, and round the Red Tail Lake Injuns back to their own stamping ground. Red Tail Lake is only forty or fifty miles north of Tilton Lake Post, and I advise that you swing around and have a talk with MacFarland before you visit Red Tail Lake. Better talk with the Indians, too. Take Ick Far along. Use your own judgment when you get there, and if you find that any

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white men have put up a job on the Indians to scare them from their hunting ground, bring them in, and I'll see that they get what's coming to them. The thing is to get these Indians back home. You'll have to step lively if you do it before snow flies."

Connie saluted, and as he crossed the room the Superintendent glanced with pride at the trim figure of his youngest recruit. "He'll get to the bottom of it," he muttered. "He's a sure enough *tillicum*."

Red Tail Lake lies beyond the Bonnet Plume Pass. On the second day out, when Connie explained to Ick Far the object of their patrol, the Indian listened in silence and at the end wagged his head gloomily. Despite years of service with the Mounted, the Indian, Ick Far, retained the savage's dread of the supernatural. But stronger than this dread was his loyalty to the service. Orders were orders. And Ick Far, albeit with fear and trembling, would have followed an officer of the Mounted to the very place of departed spirits.

On Burton Creek, and again at Hot Springs, the scout with much muttering and foreboding of evil, pointed out the graves of the men he had helped McKeever to bury.



"I'm t'ink dat *kultus* gol' she cross to de Red Tail Lak'," he grumbled. And as they pushed forward Connie's thoughts recurred to the great misshapen nugget of pure gold with its uncanny streaks of red, and to the graves that marked its trail.

At Tilton Lake Post, Connie interviewed MacFarland. But the Scotchman could add nothing to what he had already written. Whereupon, the boy turned his attention to the Indians.

With much gravity the chief of the band expounded: "In the first days of the dripping moon came a white man and a woman to Red Tail Lake. They came from the north-westward and not from the country of the Mackenzie. And upon the shore of a spruce-sheltered bay, they built a cabin. The man did not seek to trade, nor did he give any presents of tobacco, or fish-hooks, or files.

"For the space of a moon they lived in the cabin, and each day his canoe was to be seen on the lake where, always in company with the woman, he fished and hunted to obtain his winter supply of meat. Always the man appeared to be afraid. Always his eyes searched the shores. And always he scanned the faces of the Indians who approached

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in canoes as though he feared some man who would come to him over the water. But now, the Indians know that it was no man he feared, but the *kultus tamahnawus*. For one day, a small party of Indians who were hunting upon a hill saw the canoe of the white man driving rapidly down the lake. In the bow was the woman and the man was in the stern, and both paddled furiously so that the canoe shot forward with great speed. And they turned to pass down the river by which the waters of the lake find their way to the frozen sea. And even as the Indians looked, the canoe, in the time of a lightning flash, was gone. The *kultus tamahnawus* had reached from the depths and had pulled them beneath the surface of the swift-flowing river. With their own eyes, the young men who hunted had seen this thing. And in great fear they hastened to the village, and would have fled from the Red Tail Lake country. But there the hunting and trapping is good. And there come the caribou in thousands to winter, so that always there is meat in our bellies, and the robes in our lodges are warm.

"I, Sam Spotted Raven, am chief, and that night I called a council. The young men who were fear-

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ful spoke with eloquence and were loud in their demands that the village be moved far from the shores of the spirit-ridden lake. One or two even affirmed that they had seen the great hand of the *kultus tamahnawus* rise from the water and drag the canoe into the depths. But this I did not believe. For I know that young men who are stricken with fear are more apt to see with the eyes of the heart than with the eyes of the head. And there are many strange and terrible things told which, in truth, never occurred. Many of the older men were like-minded. For they knew that to move from good hunting grounds at the coming on of winter is bad. I told the young men that the canoe had struck upon a rock and had been destroyed after the manner of canoes since the memory of man. I told them they would find the broken canoe and the bodies of the drowned ones upon the bank of the river below.

"In the morning I selected three young men and three old men and we started at a point far below to search the banks of the river. In an eddy, revolving close beside the bank, we found fragments of the broken canoe with the bark battered and scraped where it had pounded against the

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rocks. 'See?' I said to the young men. 'Your *tamahdawus* has chewed up the canoe but he did not like it and he has spewed it into the river.' And the old men laughed, but the young men scowled and said nothing. And farther on, upon a bar of white gravel, the body of the man bumped softly against the pebbles in the current. He, too, had been battered upon the rocks of the rapids and we dragged him from the water and buried him after the manner of the white men." The old chief paused and puffed at his pipe of heavy tobacco:

"Once more I ridiculed the young men, and once more the old men laughed, but the young men replied that the body of the woman we had not found. That the *kultus tamahdawus* had broken the canoe and killed the man, but the woman he had taken to live with him upon the floor of the river. We continued on toward the lake, searching the banks, for I did not believe the young men. I believed we would find the body of the woman even as we had found the man.

"It was noon when we camped in the scrub but a short distance below the place where the canoe had disappeared. I wanted to visit the spot but the young men would venture no nearer, for the fear

of the *kultus tamahnawus* was heavy upon them. I persuaded them to accompany me to the hill and point out the spot so that I and the old men who were not afraid might visit the place. The hill was but a short rifle shot from the river and as we reached the top there came to our ears the sound of a splash. All looked toward the river, but nothing was to be seen save the sunlight glistening upon the surface of the swift-flowing water."

Again the old man paused and glanced nervously about: "I, Sam Spotted Raven, believe only what I see with the eyes of my head. In my heart was no fear of the *kultus tamahnawus*. And my words are true. Even as we looked, the surface of the water was broken and the head of a woman appeared with the long hair floating out upon the water and she started to swim to the shore toward the base of the hill whereon we stood. With my eyes I saw it. For I looked after the others had fled. There is no mistake. The woman came up from the water at the spot where she went down the day before. She drew near the bank and I waited no longer. No woman of flesh and blood could remain under the water for a day and a night. She, herself, was a *tamahnawus*, and she was drawing nearer!

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"When I arrived at the village I found that my people had waited not upon my orders, for the lodges were already struck. And so we came to Tilton Lake, and will return no more to the Red Tail Lake country until the white-man police has come and chased the *tamahnawus* far from there."



## CHAPTER XIV

### THE END OF THE TRAIL

FOLLOWING the back trail of Sam Spotted Raven's valiant band, Connie and Ick Far came to the site of the deserted village. That the departure of the Indians had been a hasty departure was evidenced by the litter of abandoned goods and utensils with which the ground was bestrewn. In the dusk of evening, the depressing atmosphere of abandoned habitation enshrouded the deserted encampment.

Supper was eaten in silence. On the trail Connie had ridiculed the old chief's story, and assured Ick Far they would unearth a perfectly simple explanation of the events that had struck fear to the hearts of the Indians. But the boy knew that Ick Far believed the story of Sam Spotted Raven, and as he glanced at the old scout he noted that his features were gloomy with forebodings of evil.

After carefully drawing a circle about his blan-

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kets with a forked stick of peeled willow, the Indian turned in, leaving Connie beside the dying fire to think over the chief's story. Charred ends of brushwood fell into the red coals and flared into flame that caused shifting shadows to dance among the litter of abandoned equipage, and threw into uncanny relief the twisted trunks of scrub timber. Connie caught himself darting swift, furtive glances toward the rim of the circle of firelight, while little tickly chills chased up and down his spine. The boy's fists clenched in a sudden flash of anger. "You tin horn! You're scared!" he hissed through clenched teeth. "You're a coward. You're worse than the Indians! About the only detail you're fit for is to sweep out the barracks!"

Suddenly he stood erect. "Who says I'm afraid of ghosts?" he cried. "Or *kultus tamahnawuses*, or whatever they call 'em!" And with outthrust jaw, walked deliberately into the scrub and beyond the dancing shadows, nor did he return to the fire until he had made a complete circuit of the camp. A few moments later he crawled between his blankets and as he drew them over his head an owl hooted in a near-by tree and upon a far sand-hill a lone wolf howled dismally.

After an early breakfast Connie and Ick Far examined their surroundings more closely. As the scout prowled about the litter, his attention was suddenly attracted to some faint marks which to Connie's eyes were scarcely discernible upon the hard surface of the ground.

"Someone be'n here!" he exclaimed. Then, after a few moments of silence during which he moved slowly from place to place, studying the almost invisible marks, he turned sombre eyes upon the boy. "It's de 'oman. She com,' from de riv', an' she tak' de grub, here, an' here, an' here."

"Well let's not waste any time!" cried Connie. "We must follow that trail."

For just an instant Ick Far hesitated, but after a glance into the determined face of the boy, he shrugged and lead into the scrub in the direction of Red Tail Lake. The old Indian followed almost without hesitation the trail that was several days' old and so faint that only at rare intervals, where it skirted marshes or followed the banks of creeks, was it discernible at all to the eyes of the boy.

At noon they halted upon the top of a high ridge that overlooked the bay upon which the

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Indian said the man had built his cabin. But instead of leading to the bay the trail turned sharply to the left as if to avoid the place. And abandoning it for the moment the two scrambled down the steep descent to examine the cabin, which was visible in a grove of spruce.

At the water's edge Ick Far came again to an abrupt halt and pointed to marks on the bank. "Canoe, she lan' here," he said glancing sharply about him. "Only two, t'ree days ago. A man com' een dat canoe. Dat man he no lak' to stay bury. He com' back to hees cabin."

Connie pushed open the door and here, too, were evidences of hasty departure. The blankets had been ripped from the spruce bows that covered the bunk, and upon the table the dishes remained unwashed.

"De man com' back for hunt hees 'oman, but she ain't here. He gon' 'way ag'in," remarked the scout.

Once more they returned to the water's edge. And as Ick Far again examined the signs on the bank, Connie noticed that he became suddenly excited. He dropped to his hands and knees and studied minutely the faint imprints. "Dees

man, she ain't de man w'at liv' here!" he exclaimed suddenly. "She de man w'at got cross de divide wid de *kultus* gol'."

"What!" cried Connie, stooping to examine the marks. "How do you know?"

For answer Ick Far shrugged and pointed a lean finger at the almost invisible marks, which for all Connie could tell might have been made by a rolling stone or a hurrying wolf. "Me, I'm fol' dem track from Dawson to de divide, an' she got los' een de rocks. I know dem track. W'at I'm tell you we fin' dat *kultus* gol' mak' de trouble on Red Tail Lak'? De *tamahnawus* she mad 'cause men fin' dat gol.' She wan' dat back, an' mebbe-so dey bury you an' me, too."

"Not yet they won't!" grinned Connie. "We're a long ways from dead ones yet. If the fellow that's got the nugget is on Red Tail Lake we'll just stick around and get him after we clean up the job we're detailed on. I sure would like to take that *hombre* back to Dawson!"

Finding nothing further of importance, they returned to the ridge and took up the trail of the woman. After detouring the bay this trail led to the western shore of the lake where the country

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became rapidly more broken and rocky, so that the scout, trained tracker that he was, was forced to exert his powers to the utmost. Towards evening, among the rock-hills and ridges, the trail disappeared entirely, and that night the two camped on the bank of a tiny creek. Morning found them again at work seeking to pick up the lost trail. But their efforts went for naught, and for several days the two searched unceasingly among the ridges and rock-craggs of the western shore. Here and there, the scout was able to point out where the strange woman had crossed a creek, or descended to the shore of the lake. But always the trail would return to lose itself among the rocks. Several times also he found evidence of the presence of the man who had visited the cabin after its owner's hasty departure. But this trail, too, was lost among the rocks.

Upon the evening of the fourth day as they were returning to their camp beside the little creek, both halted abruptly and stared wide-eyed toward the sky line of a naked ridge which terminated abruptly in a sheer drop of a hundred feet to the cold black waters of Red Tail Lake. For an instant there appeared, running swiftly upon the very summit of the ridge, the figure of a woman. Clean-cut and



sharp, the figure was silhouetted against the afterglow of the evening sky. Only for a moment did Connie pause to stare at the flying figure, and calling to Ick Far to follow, rushed in headlong pursuit. Across a narrow valley they dashed and, clawing, scrambling, stumbling, succeeded at length in gaining the summit of the ridge. As they paused to regain their breath the eyes of both scrutinized their surroundings. A strip of naked rock interposed between the scrub growth and the extreme end of the ridge upon which a mass of huge rock fragments stood high above the lake. And it was across this bare strip that the woman had run from the direction of the scrub.

"We've got her, now!" exclaimed Connie excitedly. "It's too steep for her to get down. She's hiding there in the rocks."

But Ick Far shook his head gloomily and pointed to the black waters which lapped at the base of the rock-wall far below. "I'm t'ink we no ketch," he said tersely. "She gon' to de *tamahnawus*—deep down on de floor of de lak'."

Connie laughed nervously. "Come on!" he said shortly, "we'll see," and led the way toward the mass of rock fragments.

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Hardly had they begun to explore the crevices and angles of the rocks, before a cry from Connie brought the old scout to his side. The boy was peering into a dark, triangular opening where a great mass of rock, in some mighty convulsion of nature, had been toppled against a shoulder of the ridge.

Seconds passed as the two stared into the black opening. Then, lying flat, Ick Far placed his ear to the rock and Connie waited in breathless suspense until the old scout scrambled to his knees. "Som't'ing een dere," he said.

"What do you think it is?" asked Connie.

The man shrugged: "Mebbe-so, 'oman, mebbe bear, *loup cervier*, wolf, man wid' de *kultus gol*'—an' mebbe-so *tamahnowus*."

The inky cavern looked uninviting enough as the boy peered into its depths, and for several moments he hesitated. Then, suddenly, with the same outthrusting of the jaw with which he had ventured beyond the firelight at the deserted camp of the Indians, he dropped to his hands and knees. Feeling a tug at his sleeve, he turned to look into the face of Ick Far.

"Better you don' go een dere. Mebbe-so,

one day—two—t'ree, bye 'n' bye eet git 'ongre an' com' out, den mebbe-so we ketch um."

"But if it's a *tamahdawus* it won't get hungry," grinned Connie, "and it won't come out."

Ick Far shrugged: "Heap *skookum*, li'l p'lice. But eef eet's *tamahdawus* een dere, you no com' out neider."

Connie considered the man's words. To tell the truth, the boy had no liking for the task, and the plan of Ick Far sounded reasonable. For a moment he considered adopting it, then, turning once more to the opening, shook his head. "If I don't go in," he muttered, "it's because I'm a *coward*! Even if we did stick around until the thing came out, I'd always know that I'd run up against something I was afraid to do! And I'm more afraid of *that*, of the nights and the days I'd spend thinking about it, than I am of anything that could squeeze through that three-cornered hole. Besides, my dad never tackled anything, he didn't see through, and I won't either. If a fellow funks once it would always be easy to do it again, but if he kind of—kind of cleans up as he goes, he can keep on believing in himself. I'd rather go in and not come out than not go in at all!"

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And Connie did go in, and a few minutes later he came out again, and with him came a woman who laughed and sobbed hysterically as she clutched tightly to her breast a packet wrapped in a piece of smoke-tanned buckskin. The woman sank down upon the rock and it was some moments before Connie's awkward efforts to quiet her met with any response. Finally, however, she gained control of herself with an effort:

"I thought you were—were that man. I saw his canoe down there and I thought he had found my hiding place. For days I have been hiding from him—" She paused and Connie cleared his throat.

"Yes'm—I mean no'm. We aren't him," he floundered. "I'm Connie Morgan of the Mounted and this is Ick Far, and we're your friends. But suppose you begin somewhere. Who is this man? And why are you hiding from him? And who was the drowned man? And what made you come up out of the water and scare the Indians?"

"It was this way," began the woman, speaking in nervous haste, so that her words came in short, jerky sentences. "It all began with *that*," she pointed to the packet that lay upon the rock

between them. "We lived over near the divide in the Bonnet Plume Pass country. My husband was a prospector and trapper, and one day a man met him near the cabin. He seemed very nervous and, thrusting the packet into my husband's hand, asked him to keep it. And the next moment he was gone.

"Several days passed and the man did not return. And then, one night, my husband opened the packet. I did not know it, then, but afterwards he told me. But he would not tell me what it contained. After that he was never the same. We left the cabin and came to Red Tail Lake, and built a new cabin. All during our journey we avoided the trading posts, and we even avoided the Indians. Always my husband seemed fearful of pursuit. I asked him what was in the packet, but he never would tell me. One day he came tearing into the cabin and seized the packet, tore the blankets from the bed, and ordered me to throw some food into the canoe. And then we paddled as fast as we could to the end of the lake and headed down the river. But just as we got into the current the canoe struck a rock that ripped her whole bottom out. I am a good swimmer, and easily

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reached shore a short distance below. But my husband, who could not swim, must have been drawn into the swifter current beyond the rock, for I never saw him again. I made my way back to the cabin, but from a near-by ridge I saw there was someone there. So I hid in the scrub and the next morning made my way back to the scene of the accident. I was hungry, and hoping that one of the packs of provisions might have caught on the rock, that reaches almost to the surface of the water, I swam to the rock, and while peering down in the clear water I saw the strange packet that was the cause of all our trouble lying upon the white gravel.

“First I thought I would let it lie there, then a strange curiosity to see what the packet contained took possession of me and, balancing upon the rock, I dived down and recovered it. Of all the contents of the canoe this packet alone had not been carried down by the current. Taking the packet with me I started in search of the Indian village which I knew was somewhere in the vicinity. I thought they would give me food and possibly take me to some trading post. I found the village, but the Indians were gone. They had evidently fled



in great haste, for the ground was littered with things they had left behind. I took a pair of blankets and all the food I could carry and made my way again to the cabin, and once more I saw from the top of the ridge that someone was there, and I dared not go down. So I came on to this cave in which my husband and I had once found shelter from a storm. I knew this lake was a favourite hunting-ground of the Indians, and sooner or later I would be rescued. But no Indians have appeared, and the man my husband feared is still searching.

"I often see his canoe upon the waters of the lake. And today, when I was returning from a visit to some snares I had set, I found it drawn up in a cove close by. I saw that his tracks headed into the scrub, and I feared he had found my cave where the packet was hidden. I ran with all my might, but the packet was safe. And then you came and I thought it was he."

The woman paused and glanced about her fearfully: "But he must be very near because his tracks lead to the ridge."

"But the packet!" cried Connie. "What is in the packet?"

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For answer the woman reached swiftly and tore off the buckskin covering, and once more Connie's eyes rested upon the misshapen outlines of the "Demon's Heart" that showed dull yellow, with its mysterious streaks of red just visible in the fast deepening twilight.

There was a swift movement, a sharp rattle of loose stones, and from the angle of a huge rock fragment a man leaped straight toward them. One hand held a tightly clutched carbine and, stooping swiftly, he snatched the nugget from the ground.

So suddenly had the man appeared, and so swift were his movements that the three stared speechless with amazement. But as his fingers closed about the great nugget, Connie's voice cut sharp and clear on the silence: "Drop that!" The command rang like a pistol shot and, even as he spoke, the boy jerked the service revolver from its holster. With a snarl the man sprang erect and leaped backward to swing his carbine into line. As he did so his heel caught a projecting sliver of rock and with a shrill scream he toppled backward, his body shot out from the edge of the cliff, and went hurtling downward into the darkness.

A moment later a loud splash sounded from far below. And upon the ridge the three gazed in silence into each other's faces.

When the Indians at Tilton Lake Post heard the story of the accident and saw that the woman who returned with Connie Morgan and Ick Far was a real woman of flesh and blood, they returned once more to their hunting-ground on Red Tail Lake.

And while the men of the Yukon wonder, Connie Morgan and Ick Far know, that the trail of the "Demon's Heart" is ended. For the great nugget lies to this day griplocked in the hand of a dead man on the floor of a black water lake in the heart of the land of gold.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE HART RIVER CACHE

THE iron-clawed winter had come roaring out of the North and descended upon the hill country in a series of furious blizzards that enveloped the rock-ribbed land and the frozen surface of lakes and rivers in a man-deep thickness of snow. B Division slept in its *mukluks*, and generally speaking, its *mukluks* were far from headquarters. For the malevolent ferocity of the storms had caught many of the dwellers of the hills and the barrens unprepared, and tons of relief grub went out with the dog trains of the Mounted.

Corporal Rickey and Special Constable Connie Morgan were crowding Connie's team of ten big *malamutes* to reach Hart River cabin where the police *cache* would supply the grub for the one hundred and twenty mile return trip to Dawson.

"The MacPherson patrol ort to be along any day now," said Rickey, as the two camped for lunch in

the shelter of a thicket of scrub. "But they'll be enough grub fer them an' us, too. They's fifty pound of flour, an' seventy-five pound of bacon, and forty or fifty pound of beans, besides five hundred-odd pound of fish fer the dogs."

"We'll pull in there this afternoon," opined Connie as he split off some shavings, while Rickey attacked a near-by spruce with his axe. Dropping to his knees the boy thrust a match into his pile of shavings, but even as the tiny flame began to lick at the light, dry wood, he straightened swiftly and glanced toward the spot where a moment before the sound of Rickey's axe had rung upon the slender trunk of a dead spruce a dozen yards away.

The sound of the axe strokes had suddenly ceased and in his ears sounded a half-stifled grunt of surprise and pain. With his back toward the boy, Rickey leaned heavily upon the fallen tree-trunk, while his right hand wrenched to loosen something from the snow at his feet. With a jerk the man straightened, and Connie saw that his face showed yellowish white against the glistening background of snow. With a cry the boy leaped to his feet, as his eyes encountered the object

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Rickey held in his hand. It was the light camp axe, red to half the depth of its blade with a filming of blood, that had already frozen upon its polished surface. Rickey took one step forward, and the boy was at his side.

"Struck a knot," explained the Corporal between clenched teeth, "an' glanced. Serves me right, I guess. I hadn't ort to had my foot there. I know'd better but—Jimminy—she hurts! Le's get over to the fire an' have a look at her."

Connie helped Corporal Rickey to a blanket spread beside the tiny blaze and hurriedly collected dead branches, while the injured man removed his *mukluk* and legging and a double thickness of blood-soaked woollen socks. As the flames bit into the dry wood, the boy made a dive for the First-Aid kit. The gash was a nasty one, bone-deep just below the ankle joint; and though they twisted a tourniquet until Rickey growled with pain, it was an hour before the flow of blood was staunched and the wound properly bandaged.

"This is a fine layout," grumbled the officer. "Ten years in the service lackin' two months, an' here I up an' sink an axe in my hoof like the rawest *chechako* that ever mushed over the Chilkoot."



"Any one would think you did it on purpose," laughed Connie.

"Couldn't of done no better job if I had," grumbled Rickey, and trailed off into a long tirade of self-accusation.

"Get it out of your system," urged the boy, "and then get some of this grub into it, and we'll hit the trail. We might be a lot worse off. We'll make the cabin tonight and you can rest up for a couple of days. The MacPherson patrol may be along before that, but even if it don't come, the old ten-team will jerk us back to Dawson, without your setting a foot on snow."

"Oh, 'tain't that," groaned Rickey, "an' 'tain't the hurtin', though that's bad enough—it bites clean up to the hip. But it's pullin' the fool stunt, an' what the boys'll say when we git back."

"That's all right," soothed Connie. "Most of 'em have pulled stunts like that themselves. Didn't McKeever shoot himself through the arm with his own gun? And didn't Peters let his canoe get away and have to walk thirty miles through swamps and over rock ridges in fly time? And didn't——"

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"Yeh, that's the trouble. An' what did I say to 'em when they done it? I've kidded 'em an' ragged 'em an' made 'em so sore that take it first an' last, I've like to had to fight the whole kit and caboodle of 'em. An' now—" he grunted dismally. "My time's up, come Febrooary, an' I've almost got a notion to lay up here on Hart River 'til then an' not 'list no more."

Connie laughed. "You ain't got nerve enough to do that, Rickey. You've got nerve enough to go back and face 'em, but you ain't got nerve enough to *quit*!" Whereat Rickey grinned and with his foot wrapped in an enormous thickness of blankets he allowed Connie to ease him onto the sled, where he suffered in grim silence with his back against the bed-rolls, until the outfit drew up before the door of Hart River cabin.

Although it was Connie's first visit to the place, he sensed from the moment he halted the dogs that something was wrong. For the snow was well trampled about the cabin and its door stood slightly ajar. Hastily removing his rackets, he pushed inside, where one swift glance assured him that his worst fears were realized. The Hart River *cache* had been robbed!

Within the four walls of the cabin there remained not a single ounce of flour, or beans, or tea, or bacon. But not alone because the *cache* had been rifled was Connie seized with the blind fury that left him white and shaking, nor was it because the five hundred-odd pounds of dry fish, which had been laid by for dog feed, was scattered promiscuously about the floor and bunk, but because of the abject wantonness, the abysmal meanness of soul that had caused the marauders to smash the little sheet-iron stove into a useless pile of junk. The voice of Rickey calling from the sled aroused the boy from his transport of rage. With a bound he reached the door.

"Someone has busted the *cache*!" he cried hoarsely, "and scattered the fish, and smashed the stove!" Suddenly he leaped for the sled. "Get off there and give me that carbine! They didn't have any dogs or sled. They're packing the stuff afoot. I'll put this old ten-team on their trail and I'll— You bet they'll wish they never *saw* Hart River cabin!"

"Hold on there, kid," soothed Rickey, as he stared up into the face of the youngest recruit in the Yukon. "Le's don't go off half-cocked. Jest

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help me inside now an' we'll size up the layout. Mebbe things ain't as bad as they look."

"Not as bad as they look!" cried Connie, his eyes blazing. "With the grub all gone, and the stove smashed, and us with only grub enough for a day or two, and the MacPherson patrol due any time and depending on this *cache* to take 'em on to Dawson, and you with your foot half cut off!"

Rickey grinned: "Well, that's the first time I ever heard you growl, an' believe me, when you growl you roar, don't you, kid? Come here now an' git in under my arm and h'ist me up offen this sled. You say they didn't take the fish. Well, there's grub, ain't it? They ain't no law ag'in a man eatin' fish jest because it's billed fer the dogs, is they?"

Connie helped Rickey into the cabin and piloted him through the litter of dry fish that covered the floor to a seat on the edge of the bunk. "That stove is sure bunged up consid'able," admitted the Corporal, "but it can be straightened out to hold a fire. It may smoke some, but that ain't going to hurt us none. 'Tain't no fancy cookin' utensil no more, but it'll boil water. And them dried fish

ain't so bad. Jest dig in now and red up the place a bit, an' then we'll make medicine."

While Connie collected the fish from the floor, unharnessed and fed his dogs, and carried firewood from the pile from behind the cabin, Rickey with the aid of his axe, succeeded in restoring the stove to some semblance of its original appearance. Luckily the pipe had escaped notice of the marauders, and the boy soon had a fire going and a kettle of fish boiling. As he busied himself about the camp, his brain worked rapidly, and later, while the two devoured their boiled fish, he broached his plan.

"We'll stay here in the cabin tonight," he began "and I'll get a good rest and rest up the dogs, and in the morning I'll hit out after those fellows. They haven't got more than two or three days' start. And when once that old leader of mine ties onto a trail, he never quits. You'll have to stay here 'til I get back with the grub and the outfit that's got it. Then we'll leave enough in the *cache* for the MacPherson patrol and hike on into Dawson with our prisoners."

"How many of 'em is they?" asked Rickey dubiously.

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"Four," answered the boy promptly. "They came in from the north-west and hit straight east toward the Mackenzie. They can't travel fast with the packs they've got."

"Hit east, did they?" mused Rickey, "an' come from the north-west? Must be part of a whalin' outfit that's got wrecked somewhere. An' believe me, they're headin' into a bleak country when they hit east from Hart River. Why, they ain't *nothin'* over there! Not a blame thing between here an' the Mackenzie except old man Wurtz's cabin, about fifty miles east of here. Wurtz, he was a kind of a prospector an' trapper. Died a couple of years back. But he sure did build some cabin. It's little, but it's a reg'lar fort—loopholes an' all. He didn't trust the Injuns none. Like as not that's where them fellows is right now. An' if they be, how in thunder do you expect to git 'em out of there? The cabin's in a kind of a bowl or basin at the head of a red rock draw, an' they can see you comin' half a mile."

Rickey shook his head. "You couldn't do it, kid. The odds ain't right. The only way to git 'em out of there would be to surround 'em an' starve 'em out. An' we ain't in no shape to do



that. Them fellows ain't goin' to be no easy job to handle. Any one that'd bust a *cache*, 'specially a police *cache*, ain't goin' to stop at nothin'. If my foot was so's I could go with you, we'd tackle it in a minute."

"Look here, Rickey," interrupted Connie, "you've got to let me try anyway. Who got you out of that pickle with the Yellow Knives? And who brought in Notorious Bishop? And who did a lot of things I could mention, if I wanted to brag? I'm no *chechako*! You needn't think I'm going to run out there and make any fool play with odds of four to one against me. But it won't hurt to have a look, anyway. And besides, if they haven't got any more sense than to bust a police *cache*, it ain't going to be hard to outguess 'em."

Rickey grinned. "If it comes down to a guessin' match you can outguess 'em, son," he admitted, eying the boy proudly. "But after you git 'em out-guessed—what you going to do then? Outguessin' 'em's one thing, an' bringin' 'em in is another."

Connie was quick to see that his superior's decision was wavering. "That'll be my job," he answered. "I brought in Notorious Bishop, didn't I?"

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"Yeh," admitted Rickey. "But they was only one of him, an' anyway he just *come* along."

Connie laughed. "Maybe these fellows will *come* along, too. Anyway Notorious was smart, and these fellows are fools or they wouldn't have busted the *cache*."

"Looks like a fool trick fer one kid to go after a hull gang."

"Four fools are four times as foolish as one fool," retorted the boy. "Anyway, you've got to let me try!"

Rickey's further objections were promptly met, and the boy obtained reluctant consent to be allowed to slip over and "have a look at 'em." After that the two redressed Rickey's wound and rolled into their blankets.

The stars were beginning to pale in the night sky when Connie's ten great *malamutes* shot out upon the trail of the four marauders. The boy was travelling light. A half-pound of tea, five pounds of pemmican, and a hundred pounds of dry fish, together with his bed-roll and carbine, made up his entire load. And on the tail of the sled the boy bent low to the sweep of the wind as the runner slipped smoothly over the wind-packed, cold-

hardened snow. On and on he flew, dipping now into a deep ravine and again topping a ridge or circling a low snow mountain. At noon he boiled a pot of tea at the place where the fugitives had evidently spent their first night in camp. "A good twenty miles," muttered the boy. "To-night ought to put me within ten miles of Wurtz's cabin."

That night he camped in a patch of scrawny scrub, where the four had made their second night's encampment. And after feeding his dogs, he ate sparingly of the pemmican, drank a little tea, and boiled half of a fish. After supper he removed his carbine from its case, assured himself that it was in proper working order, and carefully went over his service revolver. Then, spreading his bed close beside the fire he rolled in.

He breakfasted before dawn and was surprised to see that only six dogs crowded to the fire in eagerness for their morning fish. In vain the boy called and whistled, and with a sudden fear in his heart, hurried to the edge of the scrub. A slight movement attracted his attention, and, peering through the bushes, Connie saw one of the missing *malamutes* rise slowly, stagger stiffly for a step or two,

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and then fall in the snow. White froth foamed from its lips, and even as the boy looked the dog writhed in a sudden convulsion. Then with stiffened limbs, it shuddered, and lay dead in the snow at his feet. In the open another tawny shape lay rigid and frozen, and beyond a little hummock the other two huddled together—dead, their back-curved lips sealed with frozen foam.

“Poisoned!”

The single word fairly hissed from the boy's lips, and turning, he dashed toward camp where, after satisfying himself that the remaining six dogs showed no traces of illness, he began feverishly to pack the sled.

“They're the best dogs in the Yukon,” he choked, striving vainly to swallow the great lump that rose in his throat. “You just wait! You just wait!” he sobbed, shaking his fist toward the east, where the grey dawn was beginning to lighten the far horizon. He did not return the carbine case to its straps, but harnessing his dogs, threw himself upon his sled with the carbine lying conveniently beneath his legs.

For two hours the tireless leader held to the trail that bore to the eastward, while Connie with set

jaw and narrowed eyes scanned the bleak barrens for sight of the patch of scrub timber that Rickey had told him fringed the broad depression, in the centre of which old man Wurtz had built his cabin. The dogs topped a long, low ridge, and before him, a half-mile away, the boy saw the timber—a scraggling patch of scrub, the first he had encountered since his camp of the night before. With a tightening of the lips, he urged the dogs forward and a few minutes later came to a halt in the shelter of the stunted growth.

The trail of the four continued on through, and, carbine in hand, Connie crept forward to the opposite edge. Throwing himself flat, he scanned the bowl-like depression before him. Almost in the exact centre of the mile-wide sweep of snow stood the cabin. And the boy's heart gave a bound as he noted that smoke curled from its chimney.

Old man Wurtz had planned well against surprise, for, as he studied the lay of the land, Connie saw that by no possible chance could any one approach the cabin by daylight unknown to its occupants. A long time he lay turning over in his mind scheme after scheme. The poisoning of his dogs had moved the boy as nothing had ever moved

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him, and he determined that he would never return to Hart River with his friends' deaths unavenged.

His attention suddenly became riveted upon the cabin. The door opened and a man, closely followed by three others, stepped out upon the snow. Connie saw that they all carried rifles and his mittened hands tightened unconsciously upon his carbine. For what seemed an interminable period the four talked, gesticulated, and pointed, and then having apparently reached an agreement, each started in a different direction. The boy noted with a sudden thrill that they carried no packs. They had left the supplies in the cabin! Evidently then, this was a hunting expedition, or possibly they meant to lay out a trap line. The boy's brain worked rapidly as the distance widened between the four men. One was approaching directly toward him, and, wriggling back from the edge of the timber, but still keeping the man in sight, he took his position close beside the trail, screened from it by a thick growth of scrub. The dogs were upon the outer edge of the patch some two hundred yards in the rear and the boy hoped fervently that they would not get wind of the stranger until he entered the thicket. Every little



way the man paused to toss something into the snow.

"Fur poisoner!" muttered Connie between clenched teeth. "Gee whiz! You fellows'll have a lot to answer for! Guess they're whalers, all right," he added as he studied the man who was garbed from head to foot in sealskin. "Anyway, they've come down from the Eskimo country. And before I get through with 'em I'll bet they'll wish they'd stayed there!"

The man was nearing the scrub. Drawing back the hammer of his carbine, Connie levelled it between the branches of his bush. Not ten yards away at the edge of the scrub the man paused and the boy followed his glance as it swept the wide basin. The other three figures showed like little black bugs at widely separated points almost upon the rim of the basin. Dropping the butt of his rifle into the snow, the man reached into a pouch, produced a small ball of suet which he rolled for a moment between his mittens, and tossed onto the crust. Then gripping his rifle by the barrel, he turned and abruptly entered the scrub. Connie crouched until the man was within six feet of him:

"Hands up!" The words snapped short, and

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half-turning the man stared in round-eyed surprise at the figure, which appeared suddenly above the top of a bush almost at his side. "Drop that gun! Quick!"

The man's gaze focused upon the muzzle of Connie's carbine and his rifle dropped into the snow. "Now reach!" Up went the man's hands. "Walk straight ahead!" The man obeyed and came a few yards farther on to a small open space. "Lie down!" commanded the boy shortly. The man dropped to his hands and knees. "Flat! Flat on your belly! And keep on reaching!"

When the man was stretched helplessly before him, Connie approached and slipping his hand beneath the sealskin parka, withdrew a heavy cutlass, which he transferred to his own belt. After making sure that he carried no other weapon the boy backed off a few steps. "You can sit up now," he said. The man obeyed clumsily, like a trained bear. He was a low-browed, repulsive creature, his face covered by an unkempt growth of hair, above which two eyes gleamed hatefully.

"Who be ye?" he growled. "An' w'at d'ye mean orderin' a cove around that way? It'd pay ye to be more civil-like meetin' up with me. I'm

hard! An' the three that's with me's hard. We're hard men, I tell ye, an' it don't go good with them that riles us. Who be ye, I says?"

"Who? Me?" answered the boy. "I'm Special Constable Morgan of the Mounted." At the name the man started and eyed Connie searchingly. Opening his mouth he emitted a loud guffaw.

"The Mounted!" he scoffed. "Him 'thout no ha'r on 'is chin in the Mounted! Come on now, a joke's a joke, an' I will say ye got me foul. But 'nough's 'nough. I tell ye we're hard men—me an' my mates." As the man talked Connie backed, always keeping him covered, to the point where he had dropped his rifle in the snow. It was of modern bolt construction and in a jiffy the boy had unshipped the bolt and hurled it far into the scrub.

"Hey, quit that!" yelled the man starting to scramble to his feet.

"Sit down!"

Once more the man's eyes sought the muzzle of the carbine and he sat down. "Toss me that pack of poison balls!" commanded Connie. The man did not move. The next instant there was a loud report, and with a frightened cry he keeled back-

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ward into the snow. Hastily he shook off a mitten and his fingers explored the ragged gash that Connie's bullet had ripped in the side of his parka-hood. Then, without a word, he unslung the bag and tossed it to the feet of the boy.

"Get up!" commanded Connie shortly.

The man scrambled hastily to his feet. A look of fear had replaced the hateful gleam in his eyes, and Connie pointed to the rifle. "Pick that up an' smash it against a tree." The man reached for the harmless gun and banged it against the trunk of a near-by sapling. "Smash it, I said!" And with one terrified glance at the muzzle of the carbine the man sent it crashing against the tree-trunk with a force that sent the walnut stock spinning into the brush. Whereupon Connie turned upon his heel and walked towards his waiting dogs. The man followed him to the edge of the scrub.

"Hey," he called, "w'at you goin' to do?"

Connie ignored him and swung the leader into the trail.

"Hey," he persisted, "mebbe ye be the Mounted after all. Le's git t'gether. Ye can't handle us all. They's four of us an' I'm tellin' ye we're hard! W'at you goin' to do w'en ye git us 'rested."

Connie grinned into his face. "You ain't arrested," he answered. "You can go wherever you please. I'm going down to the cabin." The boy worked his dogs through the scrub and heading them for the open, threw himself on the sled.

"But, hey!" called the man. "How ye goin' to—" Without so much as turning his head, Connie cracked the whip above the ears of his dogs, and the six great *malamutes* tore over the surface of the snow that sloped gently away from the rim of the huge bowl.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE "HARD GUYS"

AT the door of the cabin he leaped from the sled, unharnessed the dogs, and drove them inside. As he returned for the sled and the harness he laughed at the sight of his late captive who at top speed was cutting across the snow-level in the direction taken by the others.

"He'll round 'em up," grinned the boy as he worked the sled over the sill and into the cabin. "I'll just make snug here and get ready for callers."

As Connie closed the door he noticed with satisfaction that it was fully four inches thick and fastened on the inside by means of two ponderous bars. As Rickey had said, the cabin was built like a fort. Dragging a heavy bench into place Connie mounted it and peered through the loopholes, which were placed high in the walls in such a position that they commanded every approach to the



cabin. Making sure that the bars would slide securely into place the boy once more threw open the door, and with an old shovel, which he took from the corner, set about filling one side of the interior with snow.

At the end of a half-hour he surveyed with satisfaction the pile that slanted four feet high against the wall.

"That will give me all the water I need," he muttered, and surveyed the wide snow sweep, where three figures were hurrying toward him from the rim of the bowl while a fourth figure slanted to intersect their trail at a point not far distant from the cabin.

As Connie watched them his jaw set tight and his eyes narrowed.

"Come on, you hard guys! But before I get you down to Dawson you'll know who's *hard*! I'll bet when I get through with you the next time you see a *cache* or a poison ball you never *will* quit running!"

He fastened the bars, and, drawing the bench to the loophole, watched the approaching four. A hundred yards from the door they paused while one of their number, advancing a few steps, called loudly:

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"Ahoy, in there, git out o' that cabin! That's our'n."

Connie laughed. "Come and get it then!" he invited. "Just help yourselves to anything around the place. Don't mind me."

"Who be ye?" roared the man.

"Special Constable Morgan of the Royal North-west Mounted Police," answered Connie, cheerfully.

"You got our grub in there!"

"Oh, is this yours?" asked the boy. "Where did you get it?"

The man turned to his companions and a long argument ensued. Once more he advanced and stopped.

"Say, w'at ye goin' to do 'bout it?"

"Do about what?" tantalized Connie.

"'Bout our grub!" roared the man. "Ye can't take folks' grub 'way from 'em no matter who ye be."

"Can't I?"

"Say, look-a here," continued the man, "ef ye ain't got grub 'nough we'll let ye ship 'nough to take ye w'ere ye're goin' to, an' that's fair."

"Oh, I've got grub enough. I've got enough to

last me all winter. And besides, I'm not going anywhere."

Once more the man turned to his companions, and after some moments of excited conversation, another stepped forward.

"Hey, look-a here," he bellowed, fiercely, "we don't b'lieve ye're no p'lice!" Connie's only answer was a taunting laugh. "We don't know who ye be or w'ere ye come from, but ye hain't nothin' but a kid, an' I'm a-tellin' ye w'en ye cross us ye're tampering with death. We're men o' short temper, we are! We're hard!"

Again Connie laughed. "So your partner told me this morning," he drawled, "when I walked up and took his gun away from him and made him roll around in the snow like a trick bear. Who's been kidding you? Trot along now and don't bother me. I'm hungry. I'm going to fry some nice sizzly bacon and cook up a pot of beans." Suddenly, one of the men raised his rifle and fired and the bullet sputtered dully against the thick logs. "Have all the fun you want," called Connie, "only don't break any windows, or I'll have to take your guns away."

A few more scattering shots were fired, and, as

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Connie prepared his meal, he hopped up every few minutes to peek through the loophole at the four sealskin-clad figures, who, after circling the cabin a few times, settled themselves upon the snow. Standing upon his bench, the boy ate his bacon and beans as he watched the men jump up at intervals to slap their arms across their chests and stamp about in the snow to keep warm. A stiff wind had arisen and it was growing colder. With his axe Connie drove the plugs into the loopholes on the windy side of the cabin.

"Ahoy!" called a voice from the outside.  
"We're froze!"

"Why, hard men like you oughtn't to freeze," taunted the boy. "If you're cold why don't you build a fire?"

"They hain't no wood."

"Plenty back in the scrub."

"But we hain't got no grub, an' we're hungry."

"Hard men oughtn't to get hungry. Eat a few of those suet balls."

"They're pizen!" cried the man.

"Eat 'em anyway. You're hard."

"Hey, ye can't starve us!" broke in another.

"If I can't you must have grub."

"I mean, it's murder!" yelled the man.

"Oh, don't let a little thing like that worry you," mocked Connie. "You're hard!"

"We'll burn ye out!" threatened another.

Connie laughed. "How you going to do it?" he asked. "Hold a match against the logs 'til they catch?"

"Hey, w'at be ye goin' to do?" roared the first speaker.

"Who? Me?" asked Connie. "Well, after a while I'm going to have some more nice bacon, and some nice hot bean soup, and some tea, and make me up a batch of biscuits. What you going to do?"

"Come out here an' we'll show ye."

"Hey!" called the man whose gun Connie had taken away in the morning. "It'll go sixty below tonight an' we'll freeze. An' we hain't got no grub. Hain't ye goin' to give us no grub?"

"Sure," answered the boy.

"Well, give it here, then. We're hungry."

"All right, come and get it."

The man turned to his companions and there followed a short colloquy. "W'at d'ye mean, come an' git it?" he asked.

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"I mean just what I say! Do what I tell you to and I'll give you the grub. And you'd better do it quick because I'm tired fooling with you. Stand in a row, the four of you."

The men looked at each other and slowly formed themselves into a row.

"Now, forward march!" cried the boy. "Toward the door."

The men advanced uncertainly.

"Go back and get your guns!" commanded Connie and the men obeyed. "Now march!"

When they were fifty yards from the cabin, he called halt. The men stopped.

"Stick your guns, muzzle down in the snow. All three of 'em. Now hang your cutlasses on 'em."

Two of the men obeyed, jamming the rifles into the snow with the stocks in the air. The third was slower, evidently trying to dissuade the others. But presently he, too, stuck his rifle in the snow and took his place beside it.

"Hang your cutlasses on the butts!" called Connie. "Quick!" The men obeyed. "Now, turn around and walk the other way."

Three of them turned, but the man who had



been reluctant to comply with the order leaped to recover his rifle, and as he did so Connie's carbine cracked loud and sharp and the rifle with its stock shattered went spinning into the snow. The man started backward with a cry and after one frightened look towards the cabin hastily joined his companions. Thirty yards away they paused.

"Keep going!" yelled the boy. "Keep going 'til you hear a shot." And the four turned dejectedly.

"W'ere's the grub?" one of them called.

"You can come back for that after I've got your rifles in the cabin."

On and on the men tramped pausing every now and then to listen. But not until they were half-way to the edge of the bowl did Connie fire. Jumping down from his bench he threw open the door and carried the weapons to the cabin. He presently emerged with a light kettle and some dried fish which he carried to the spot where the men had left the rifles. Motioning them in, he once more barred the door and ten minutes later was greeted by an angry howl.

"Hey, this here's dog feed!"

"I know," answered Connie from his loophole.

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"And it's a shame to waste it. It looks better than it tastes, too. But you won't mind that, you're hard."

"We hain't got no fire to cook it with, an' we hain't got but three or four matches," complained one man.

"Better not waste 'em, then," called Connie cheerfully. "But if you do, they say you can make a fire by rubbing two sticks together. You might try anyhow. Skip along over the timber, now, and show up in the morning in time for breakfast."

"Our blankets is in there," whined another.

"So they are," answered Connie. "I'll let my dogs use 'em tonight. Build a big fire and if you're too cold to sleep, jump around."

"We hain't got no axe, nor nothin'," called another.

"Use dead limbs. If you haven't got an axe bite 'em off, you're hard. And I'll bet you're mad enough to. I'd be." And the boy chuckled as he watched the men pick up the kettle of fish and start laboriously for the fringe of timber.

Hardly had he finished his breakfast next morning, when a call from without brought Connie to

the loophole for a peep at the four dejected-looking figures that stood in a row before the cabin.

"Ahoy!" called one of the men. "We want somethin' to eat. An' we don't want no fish neither! We hain't no dogs!"

"It ain't what a man wants, it's what he gets that makes him fat," grinned the boy. "You'll eat snow, or fish. And you won't get fish unless you work for it. There's the nose of an old sled sticking out of the snow at the corner of the cabin. Dig it out and drag it up in front of the door. And while you're doing it, I'll boil your fish."

"Look-a here!" roared one of the men. "We knows our rights. Ef ye're a Mounted ye hain't got no right to starve prisoners nor make 'em work neither."

"Prisoners!" exclaimed Connie in feigned astonishment. "I haven't got any prisoners. You fellows are free to come and go as you like. I'm not holding you."

"But we hain't got no grub, nor blankets."

"Well, I'm giving you a chance to earn some grub. If you want to eat you can dig that sled out. And if you don't you can go swimming, or do whatever you want to do,"

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"We hain't got nothin' to dig with," whined a man, "an' the snow's hard."

"You're hard, too," reminded Connie. "Use your hands."

"We'll give ourself in charge," broke in another. "Now, ye've got to feed us an' ye dasen't freeze us or make us work neither! Come out here an' put us in irons like a man!"

Connie laughed. "I don't want you. I haven't got any orders to arrest anybody. But if I was four hard guys, and hungry as you fellows look, I'd dig that sled out. 'Cause you don't eat till it's in front of the door. And that goes!"

After some wrangling among themselves the men advanced to the corner of the cabin and as Connie put the kettle of fish to boil he heard the low growl of their voices as they worked. Fifteen minutes later the sled, a heavy, roughly constructed affair, was before the door and once more the men were clamouring for food. Connie inspected the job through the loophole.

"All right!" he approved. "Now hike and I'll bring your grub out."

"We want to come in where it's warm!" whimpered one.

"You'll be warm enough directly," answered the boy. "'Cause when you get through eating you're going to tackle a job that just to think about will keep you warm all the rest of your lives. You're so hard maybe you won't mind it. But believe me, by the time you get back to Hart River cabin you'll know you've been somewhere."

"Look-a here," began one of the men, "if we hain't prisoners ye can't take us now'eres, an' if we be ye got to feed us an' ye can't make us work. W'at yer going to do 'bout *that*?"

"You must be a lawyer," grinned Connie. "I don't like lawyers. I've only known one. His name was Mr. Squigg, and when we got through with him, he started out and I guess he's going yet; I'm going to hit for Hart River in about an hour. You don't have to come. You can stick around here if you want to. But somehow I've got a hunch you're coming along. Hike out there, now, your fish is ready."

The men hiked. When they were a quarter of a mile away Connie opened the door and, jerking the cumbersome sled to one side, tossed the blankets of the four upon it. Then removing the kettle of boiling fish from the stove he walked

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a hundred yards or so from the door and deposited it on the snow. Returning to the cabin he proceeded to pack his own sled. Every ounce of grub about the place was neatly packed, then his own bed-roll, into which was bound the axes, and cutlasses of the men, and the bolts from their rifles, was bound to the top of the load and the six big *malamutes* harnessed. Once more Connie mounted his bench. The men had finished their fish and stood eying the cabin sullenly.

"How did you like your breakfast?" asked the boy and laughed. "I'm feeding you dog's feed, and I'll make you do dog's work. It's an insult to dogs, and I ought to get bit for doing it. But I'm going to poke a *babiche* line out through this hole. Your beds are on that sled. Make the line fast and hike out on the back-trail."

"W'ere's our grub?" asked one of the men in sudden alarm.

"Oh, I'll take care of the grub end of it," answered Connie. "All you've got to do is to tie onto that sled and beat it. And the quicker you get at it the quicker you'll eat again because we're going to be ten miles from here by dinner time." He poked the rope through the hole and with much



muttering and grumbling the men made it fast to the sled, and pulled it out onto the trail.

"Her bottom needs scrapin'," complained one, "she's listed to port, an' she don't tow true."

"You can't worry and keep your health," grinned Connie.

"We can pack them blankets handier," said one of the men. "We hain't used to no sled."

"You will be before you get through with it," encouraged the boy. "'Cause that sled is your meal-ticket, and if you don't show up at feeding time with it there ain't going to be any feeding time, see? Now get!"

When the cumbersome outfit was well on its way Connie left the cabin and, circling widely around the four toiling men, came into the trail ahead of them.

"Your dinner will be waiting for you where you camped in the scrub the second night out from Hart River cabin!" he called and, cracking his whip loudly, headed his dogs over the back-trail.

Connie arrived at the appointed place hours ahead of the four marauders. Toggling his dogs to prevent them picking up stray poison balls he ate his dinner and then, one by one, carried the four

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dead dogs and laid them in a row beside the trail. When he had finished he boiled a kettle of fish and sat down upon his pack to wait.

It was nearly three o'clock before he caught sight of the men toiling around the foot of a near-by hillock. The boy raised his hand and the men halted, and sank wearily onto the sled. "Dinner's ready!" he called, "and after dinner you can load on those four dead dogs. It's forty miles from here to Hart River cabin and I'm in a hurry. You fellows ought to make fifteen miles a day. Every fifteen miles I'll *cache* enough grub to take you to the next *cache*—and matches, too. I'll stick 'em on a pole in the trail so you can't miss 'em. You know by this time that I mean what I say, and if you don't bring in those four dogs you don't eat when you get to Hart River!"

"W'at ef a storm blows up an' we loose our course?" whined one of the men.

Connie glanced at the sky. "There won't be any storm for the next couple days," he answered. "But if I were you fellows, I'd make good time."

"Our feet's sore," whined another.

"W'ere you takin' us?" cried a third.

"I ain't taking you anywhere. I'm just telling

you where you'll find some grub *caches* if you happen to be going that way."

"We can't make no fifteen mile a day. Not with no deck cargo o' dead dogs."

"Then you won't eat so often," answered Connie. "So long! I must be going."

It was long after dark the next night when Connie pushed open the door of the Hart River cabin. Rickey lay on the bunk and stared in surprise as the boy unloaded the missing supplies.

"Where's the rest of your dogs?" he asked.

"Poisoned!" answered the boy laconically.

"But how did you git the grub?"

"Outguessed 'em."

"But didn't they have no guns? An' where are they at?"

"Yeh, they had guns," answered Connie, "but I took 'em away from 'em. They'll be along day after tomorrow. They're travelling kind of slow, 'cause they got a big load and a bad sled. But they'll get here."

"But who's with 'em? Who's bringin' 'em in?" persisted Rickey.

"Oh, they're just coming of their own accord. You see there's no place else for 'em to go. I

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*cached* some grub in fifteen-mile spaces and they've got to keep humping or they'll get hungry."

Rickey regarded the serious-faced boy for a full minute. "Well I'll be doggoned!" he howled, bursting into a roar of laughter. "Lettin' prisoners bring in theirselves! Ow! My gran'mother! But how did you——"

"They ain't prisoners!" Connie hastened to explain. "You see, I didn't arrest 'em."

"But what's the idee of makin' 'em bring in the dogs?"

"Those were good dogs," answered the boy, gravely. "They never knew what it was to quit. They died in the service. They're going to be buried right here in decent graves. And the men that killed 'em are going to bury 'em. You see, if I had arrested those men I couldn't make 'em work."

The next morning the MacPherson patrol came in, and three days later, when the whole outfit pulled out for Dawson, they had in charge four very sore and dejected prisoners. As they strung out onto the trail, Special Constable Connie Morgan dropped back, removed his cap, and turned for one last look at the cabin beside which

four little wooden crosses rose from mounds of snow.

Into each cross was burned deeply the name of a dog, and following the name were the letters, O. H. M. S., which in the far Northland is a mark of honour upon any grave. For it means that the cross was erected to the memory of one who died On His Majesty's Service.

And then Connie caught up with the patrol, but, although his brother officers questioned him unceasingly, the boy kept his own council, and it was only by patching together the whimpered complaints of the prisoners that the men of the Mounted learned the whole story of what happened at Wurtz's cabin.

## CHAPTER XVII

### CONNIE PLAYS A HUNCH

CONNIE MORGAN halted his great *malamutes* in the middle of the ice-locked Yukon and gazed wistfully toward the familiar outlines of Dawson. For a year the little sub-arctic city had been home to him. And as his eyes rested upon the buildings of B Division standing spick and span and clean in their coats of whitewash and paint, his lips pressed tight. Behind those walls from which, only a few minutes before, he had stepped for the last time, were the men who had been his friends—big men, those—great hearted and clean minded—the men who kept the Yukon good. He thought of the grey-haired Superintendent with the twinkling eyes and military moustache; of big Sergeant Dan McKeever, and Corporal Rickey; and Ick Far, the silent reader of signs. Then there were the constables: Beatty, and Dowling, and Shorty Peters—



the boy's forehead puckered in a frown as he thought of Peters.

"I liked Shorty," he muttered. "He would do anything in the world for a friend. Everybody likes him. The Superintendent said this morning that all Shorty needs to make a first-class man is a good stiff jolt that will wake him up."

For three weeks past the men of B Division had mentioned Peters's name rarely, with grave faces and in the past tense, as men speak of the dead. "Trouble with Shorty was, he never stopped to think. He did the first thing that popped into his head. But just the same he was a fool to desert. His time will be up next month. Wherever he is I bet he is wishing that he was back this very minute." With a last look at the town Connie cracked his long whip and started the dogs northward down the Yukon.

It was a late spring, and as the sled slipped smoothly over the hard-packed snow the boy thought of that other day just a year ago when he had slashed the lashings of his pack and shot those same dogs out over the shore ice to rescue Big Dan McKeever from death on the floating ice-pan.

One by one, as he mushed steadily northward,

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the incidents of the past year crowded through his brain. It had been a great year for the boy—those twelve months during which he had served side by side with the men of the Mounted—a year that had rounded out and crystallized the hand-hammered principles that were his heritage from Sam Morgan and that his association with Waseche Bill and the rough men of the gold country had taught him to apply to life in its daily round.

Connie Morgan was not one whit less a boy than the day he stepped onto the wharf at Anvik with eight dollars in his pocket and abiding faith in his ability to find his father somewhere in the great white land of snow. But he was a boy trained now by experience. A boy whose nerve and grit and impulsive nature had become subserved to cool reason, and who had learned to probe deep into the heart in his judgment of men. Time and again in the big country, where only the fit survive, he had proven himself fit. Bearded men spoke his name with respect—as they had spoken the name of Sam Morgan. They called him a sourdough, and a *tillicum*—and north of sixty, above those words sounds no higher praise.

"Hello, Const'ble!" a man stepped from the trail and thrust out a dark hand.

"Hello, Tim!" cried Connie, as he grasped the hand.

"A-ha, Tim Big Martin, she got for say t'ank to l'il p'lice. Som' day she mebbe-so git chanst to show she no fergit."

Connie grinned: "That's all right, Tim. How's the family?"

The half-breed's homely face stretched into a broad grin: "A-ha, *bien!* Das fambly she got wan more now—I'm not fergit das night you breeng de doctaire. Das li'l bab' w'ot com' in de night ob de beeg snow—she fine boy I'm tell you! We mak' de nam' Spes' Const'ble Mo'gan Big Martin," he announced proudly. "An' mebbe-so som' tam's he grow oop an' be *kloshe* p'lice, too, Ba Gos'!"

"You're all right, Tim," laughed the boy; "when he's old enough to go to school, let me know. We'll make a policeman out of him, you bet! With a name like that he'll just naturally have to break into the Service!" Connie called sharply to his dogs and as they leaped to their feet the half-breed stepped closer and laid a hand on the boy's arm!

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"Oop on de head Coal Creek, two men, dey hunt de moose for sell."

"Poachers, eh!"

The man nodded and with his lips close to the boy's ear whispered: "Wan man you know—mebbe-so she gone *kultus*."

"A man I know gone *kultus*!" exclaimed Connie. "What do you mean? Who is he?" But the other only shrugged, and shifting his pack, stepped into the trail and swung off toward Dawson.

"Now what in thunder does that breed mean?" soliloquized the boy as the dogs strung out onto the trail. "One of those poachers is Brek Wiley all right, he's an old hand at the game and a mighty slippery customer—Big Dan McKeever has tried for years to catch him with the goods. But who is the other one—the man that's gone *kultus*? Tim didn't mean Brek Wiley—he always was *kultus*. Guess I'll just swing over onto the head of Coal Creek and see what's doing." Suddenly the boy stopped dead in his tracks: "Gee Whiz!" he exclaimed aloud, "I forgot I'm no longer in the Service!" He ran to catch up with the dogs. "I could turn the job over to Ewing at Fortymile," he muttered as he mushed northward; "but, some-

how, I'd kind of like to handle this one myself. I've just *got* to know who that other man is. Maybe—By George! *I'll do it!* I haven't got any authority to, but *they* won't know my time's up. And if I can bring 'em in I'll take a chance on getting the authority afterwards.

"Wouldn't Dan roar if I should bring in Brek Wiley with a good clear case against him!"

Avoiding Fortymile, Connie swung from the Yukon and headed up a small tributary that flows in from the north-east. The long winter was losing its grip on the hill country and the surface of the snow softened at mid-day. On the first day after leaving the big river the boy camped and made moccasins for his dogs. With their feet protected from the flinty surface of the crust that formed as the sun sank low the big *malamutes* made good time, and noon of the third day off the river found him camped on a spruce-capped ridge of the Ogilvie Range with the deep-gored valleys of the feeders of Coal Creek spread out before him like giant fingers reaching into the hills.

"Somewhere in that tangle of ridges and canyons I'm going to find Brek Wiley and the *kultus* man," gritted the boy, as he boiled a pot of tea over a tiny

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smokeless fire. "I've got to be mighty careful, too, 'cause they say Brek Wiley can pick up a trail like an Injun."

For three days Connie busied himself snaring rabbits and ptarmigans to eke out his slender larder and provide food for his dogs, and always he strained his ears for the sound of a shot that would disclose the whereabouts of the poachers.

The first day he surprised a moose at close range, and on the third day a huge bull and two cows crossed the divide a half-mile to the eastward and descended into the valley of Coal Creek.

"That ought to help 'em out," muttered Connie as he watched the huge animals disappear in the scrub.

An hour later, sharp and clear, from a point some two or three miles below where the moose had entered the timber, rang the sound of a shot swiftly followed by another, and after a short interval of silence four or five more in rapid succession.

"Three less moose and two less poachers in the Yukon," grinned the boy, as he slipped into the valley and hurried in the direction of the shots.



On and on he went, following the trail of the three moose. At the end of an hour he slackened his pace and began to advance cautiously from boulder to boulder, pausing every few moments to listen and reconnoitre the foreground. At length the sound of voices reached his ears, and throwing himself flat upon the crust, he wriggled forward into the shelter of a huge rock that jutted sharply from the shoulder of a low ridge.

In an open space formed by a bend of the creek two men were busily engaged in quartering the carcass of a cow moose. The bull had already been quartered and loaded upon a sled, with the huge antlered head bound securely upon the top of the load. The other cow lay where she had fallen. The smaller of the two men straightened himself, glanced cautiously about him, and cleansed his sheath knife by drawing the flat of it across the sleeve of his coat. "I tell yeh, Brek Wiley, it's rotten business, an' I wisht I was well out of it." Something in the man's voice caused Connie to strain forward for a closer view as Wiley paused in the act of cleaving the backbone of the moose with an axe.

"Cold feet, eh," sneered the poacher. "Ye're

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'fraid the Mounted'll grab ye an' take ye in out o' the cold. Well, they won't. I be'n doin' 'bout as I pleased ever sence I hit this here country, ten year back. An' I hain't allus pleased to do jest what the law says, neither. Take the moose business, I be'n sellin' 'mountain beef' fur goin' on three year, an' I hain't be'n nabbed fur it nuther. They's good money in it—beats gougins fer gold where they hain't none no more, an' it beats crankin' win'lasses an' choppin' cord wood fer wages."

"They ain't got yeh yet—but they will, sure as shootin'—an' me, too. Yeh don't know 'em like I do. I served with 'em its goin' on five year an' I ought to be with 'em yet—would of, too, if it hadn't be'n fer you—" Connie caught a glimpse of the man's face. It was Shorty Peters!

"There ye go! Still chawin' over that ol' cud!" cried the other—"ef yer so blame anxious to be in the Mounted why'n't ye go back to 'em then. Ye don't dast to, that's why! Ye're a deserter, an' they'd stick ye in the pen 'til yer hair turned white 'cause ye happened to quit 'em a couple months afore yer time was out. An' now yer blamin' me 'cause ye hain't back doin' time! I tell ye ye was a



"In an open space two men were quartering the carcass of a cow moose."

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deserter 'fore I hooked up with ye! An' 'cause I tol' ye ye was a fool to go back, yer tryin' to shove it off onto me!"

"I wisht I was back in the service right now. An' if I done what's right I'd take you in."

The other laughed shortly: "Jest you try it onct an' see how fer ye'd git! Ye're 'fraid to try it. Ef ye did happen to fetch me in, what'd happen? I s'pose ye didn't kill none of the meat that's in the *cache*. An' I s'pose ye hain't helped sell none. Guess I didn't know what I was doin' when I tuk ye along to dicker with Swede Johnson down to No Luck, an' Tom Ashley, an' them contractors down on the river? An' I guess ye didn't help deliver none of it neither! An', of course, if ye tuk me in, I'd take my medicine an' shet up about it, wouldn't I? An' I wouldn't put up no holler fer them other fellers to testify that me an' you was pardners, would I? No, sure not! I'd jest shet up an' let ye git credit fer fetchin' in Brek Wiley. I tell ye, Shorty, yer in too deep. Ye'd git it worser'n what I would, 'cause on top of yer game-law sentence, ye'd git soaked good an' proper fer desertin'. They's more money in meat than they is in policin'. Wild game is as much mine an'

yourn as it is any one else's an' they hain't no one got no right to tell us when we kin kill it or how many we kin kill, nohow. Buck up, now, an' git to work on that there other cow—an' when the meat business plays out I got another little scheme up my sleeve."

Shorty set to work upon the carcass of the dead moose. "When the meat business plays out I'm through," he retorted sharply. "I ain't no crook an' I'm goin' outside an' live decent. I won't go in on no other scheme."

Once more Brek Wiley laughed. "Won't ye? We'll see when the time comes. Guess I'm the boss o' this outfit. Ye'll do as I say. Fat chanst ye've got o' gittin' outer the Yukon if I slip the word to the Mounted."

A half-hour later their task was finished, and the two men turned their attention to the sled. With Wiley in the trace ropes and Shorty pushing behind, the heavily loaded sled was worked over the hard crust to a point scarcely a quarter of a mile away where it was halted before the cleverly concealed door of a dug-out. Connie managed to follow, keeping well within the shelter of boulders and scrub timber, and from the vantage point

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of an old shaft dump watched the men carry the quarters into the *cache*.

The boy noted that the abandoned cabin of a miner had been patched up and made habitable, and when the men returned for the remainder of the moose meat, he made a wide detour which brought him to the creek far above, from which point, after a hard climb, he regained his camp on the ridge.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### AN AMENDED REPORT

It was almost dark when Connie Morgan swung his outfit in toward the little cabin on Coal Creek. As the dogs stopped at the sharp word of command the door flew open and a man appeared on the threshold. The man was Brek Wiley and Connie knew that his keen eyes had taken in at a glance every detail of the outfit.

"Onharness an' come in," he invited surlily, "grub'll be ready when my pardner gits back."

As Connie entered the room the man slipped a pan of baking-powder bread into the oven.

"Prospecting?" asked the boy as he seated himself on a case of canned goods, behind which he saw the butt of a service revolver protruding from its holster.

"Uh-huh, that is, we was. We're a-waitin' fer water now to clean up the dump with."

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"You haven't done any digging lately, I see. Your dump is pretty well snowed under."

The man shot him a sidewise glance: "Not fer quite a spell," he answered. "The gravel kind o' run out an' we figgered on seein' how she shows 'fore we go no deeper. Spring's so late, though, it looks like it never would git here."

"That meat smells good"; Connie eyed the thick moose steak that sizzled in the frying-pan. "I've been kind of low on fresh meat."

"Where ye headin', an' what might yer name be?" queried the man as he turned the steak in the pan.

"Connie Morgan, and I'm——"

The fork clattered noisily upon the floor as the man regarded him with out-popping eyes: "Connie Morgan—Sam Morgan's boy, that's with the Mounted? That got the best of Bill Cosgrieve an' his Cameron Crickers, an' fetched in Notorious Bishop, an'——"

Connie laughed: "That's me. And this time I'm after poachers. How's the hunting?"

Brek Wiley was a man schooled to emergency. Stooping, he recovered the fork from the floor and wiped it carefully upon the sleeve of his shirt.

"I don't know how ye fellers does it," he said, looking squarely into the eyes of the boy, "but ye sure come to the right place when ye come to Coal Crick. They's be'n a sight o' moose kilt in this here valley 'thin the last month or so. I hain't a informer, mind ye, an' I don't b'lieve in makin' no trouble fer no man. But, a word to the wise is foolish, as the feller says, an' if I was a-huntin' poachers, when I hit the forks, 'bout six or eight mile above here, I'd foller the north prong—that's all. It's a doggone shame a-killin' off all the moose an' caribou, that-a-way, an' what they don't kill they run out of the country. It's got so me an' my pardner's got to take a hull week fer to kill us a moose fer meat, an' when we come here we c'd step out the door an' git one most any time." The man slid the frying-pan to the back of the stove. "An' that reminds me—it's grub time an' he hain't showed up yet. Guess I'll jest step out an' see what's a-keepin' him."

"You needn't mind, Brek. Shorty can find his way back." There was a hard note in the boy's voice and at the words the man whirled midway of the floor—whirled to stare into the muzzle of the service revolver which the

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boy had slipped from its holster behind the canned goods' case.

"What ye mean?" he snarled. "An' what's the meanin' o' the gun play?"

"It means that your game is up, Brek Wiley. It means that you are under arrest for violating the game law of the Yukon Territory, and that you are caught with the goods." As the boy spoke the door opened and Shorty Peters stood staring open-mouthed at the grim tableau.

"Come on in, Shorty, and shut the door. It's cold. I've just been telling Mr. Brek Wiley that he is under arrest for poaching."

Mechanically Peters entered and closed the door still staring uncomprehendingly from one to the other.

"As I was saying," continued the boy, once more addressing Wiley: "It means that Constable Peters has taken his time and worked up an iron-clad case against you. He's got all the evidence he needs, and then some. It's about as pretty a piece of work as has been put over in B Division in a long while."

Beside the door Shorty Peters listened incredulously to the boy's words. Suddenly he

stepped forward and cleared his throat gruffly:  
“But——”

“That’s all right, Shorty,” interrupted Connie, speaking rapidly, “I tell you the Superintendent will be tickled with this job. They’ll make you a Corporal for this.”

At the words Brek Wiley turned upon the astounded Shorty and from his lips poured a perfect tirade of vituperation and invective. And as the man’s words flowed his rage increased until in a very paroxysm of fury he turned on Connie, who noted with satisfaction that the man’s abuse had angered Peters.

“But it’s a lie!” he roared. “I tell ye it’s a lie! Shorty’s a deserter! An’ him an’ me throw’d in together to sell meat. I kin prove it by Swede Johnson, an’ Tom Ashley, an’ them contractors. I hain’t no fool! He’s in as deep as me. He done his share of the killin’, an’ the deliverin’, too, an’ he got his share of the money.”

Connie laughed: “Of course he did, and that’s the best evidence he’s got. And if he hadn’t done his share of the killing he’d never have got any evidence on you. And you fell for the ‘deserter’ game like any *chechaka*! Dan McKeever could

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never have worked that—you know him too well. But Shorty did, and you grabbed the bait like a hnnngry salmon.” The boy shot a glance toward Peters who was studying the floor intently, and continued with scarcely a pause. “If you had been really smart, Wiley, you would have known that no man in his right senses would desert the Service and throw in with you. Why, he’d know in a minute that it would be only a question of time before we’d get him. But aside from all that there is something you don’t know anything about—something that you couldn’t understand if I should tell you: It’s the Honour of the Mounted—but in the Service we know what it means. We’d give our lives for it.” He paused and turned to Peters, “Wouldn’t we, Shorty?” he asked suddenly.

The man jerked himself erect: “You bet we would, kid!” he exclaimed, huskily. And Brek Wiley glancing into his face knew that he meant what he said.

The journey down Coal Creek was made without incident except that the usually loquacious and light-hearted Shorty maintained a tight-lipped silence upon which Connie did not seek to



intrude. At No Luck the man disappeared to return an hour later wearing his service uniform, and thereafter the boy noticed that Shorty's eyes gleamed balefully whenever they rested for a moment upon the back of Brek Wiley who was made to break trail ahead of the dogs.

The boy knew that his brother officer was thinking as he had never thought before, and that the decision he arrived at by the time they reached the big river would be the shaping decision of his life. And neither by word nor look did Connie intimate that he entertained so much as the slightest doubt of the other's sincerity.

Twenty miles above its mouth, they swung from Coal Creek and cutting through the hills came out upon the Yukon at some distance above Fortymile. And when the boy saw Shorty turn resolutely toward Dawson, he knew that from that moment the Mounted could boast no stauncher officer than Constable Peters. When they had camped for dinner on the river trail Connie turned to the Constable: "Well, Shorty, I'll be leaving you here," he said; "I'm going the other way."

Peters regarded him with amazement.

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"Goin' the other way!" he exclaimed. "What do you mean? Wasn't you detailed to patrol Coal Creek after poachers?"

Connie laughed: "No, I wasn't detailed for anything. I'm 'on my own,' now. My time was up last week, and I'm heading for Eagle. I just cut across to the head of Coal Creek on a hunch. I didn't have any authority to arrest anybody. You'll have to take the prisoner in—anyway, he's your prisoner. You've worked up the evidence."

"On your own!" muttered the Constable as if unable to grasp the idea. "You mean that—that you ain't goin' to re-enlist? That you're quittin' us fer good?"

Connie nodded: "Yes," he answered, "I've got to get back to Alaska. You see I've got a mine there and I expect my pardner will be coming inside again this year. You won't have any trouble taking Wiley in." The boy thrust out his hand. "So long, Shorty. Your time's up this spring, too—but I suppose you'll re-enlist!"

Shorty, who had been studying minutely the toes of his *mukluks* raised his eyes to the boy's. "You bet, I'm goin' to re-enlist," he answered gruffly. "That is, if—" he stopped abruptly and gripped

the outstretched hand of the boy. "I'll take him in, all right," he said. "They might be some chanst that strawberries'll be ripe along this here river tomorrow, but they ain't no chanst I won't take Brek Wiley into Headquarters—an' don't you ferget it! So long, kid. We'll sure miss you back here. You've done some big things over here in the Yukon—things that'll be remembered an' talked about. But they's other things—things that mebbe won't be talked about, that you've done. An' mebbe them things is bigger than the ones that is. An' say, kid," he added, as Connie swung his dogs toward Eagle, "whenever you get one of them hunches—*you play it*—see!"

Finding the police station at Fortymile vacant, Connie took the receiver from the hook, called Headquarters, and for an hour held earnest conversation with the Superintendent.

Late the following evening Constable Peters turned Brek Wiley over to the officer in charge of the guard room and proceeded to make out his report. At its conclusion he noticed that a light still burned in the office of the Superintendent. He opened the door and crossing to the desk saluted and turned in his report. The grey-

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haired Superintendent picked up the paper and read:

“The Officer Commanding  
B Division, R. N. W. M. Police,  
Dawson, Y. T.”

SIR:

I have the honour to submit the following report. On March 1st, I deserted the service and threw in with one Brek Wiley for the purpose of killing moose and caribou out of season and selling same to Swede Johnson, Tom Ashley, and Contractors Kirby and Jones. We went to the head of Coal Creek and set up a camp. We killed nine moose and seven caribou, part of which we delivered to above parties, and the rest is *cached* on Coal Creek.

Three days ago ex-special Constable C. Morgan arrested Brek Wiley in the cabin on Coal Creek and supposing I was in the service and was working on the case, turned him over to me.

I brought the prisoner in and can produce evidence that will convict him of violation of the game law.

I am equally guilty, and I hereby surrender myself on charges of desertion from the service of the R. N. W. M. Police, and violation of the game law.

I have the honour to be, sir,

Your obedient servant,

J. H. PETERS, Constable.

Twice the Superintendent read the words from

beginning to end, then scowling darkly he placed the paper upon the desk and drew a blue pencil through line after line. At length he looked



“Your reports are too long, Peters,” growled the superintendent.

squarely into the eyes of the man who stood before him at attention.

“Your reports are too long, Peters,” he growled, and extended the paper toward the Constable who read:

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"The Officer Commanding  
B Division R. N. W. M. Police,  
Dawson, Y. T."

SIR:

I have the honour to submit the following report.  
. . . Three days ago ex-special Constable C. Morgan arrested Brek Wiley in the cabin on Coal Creek and . . . turned him over to me.

I brought the prisoner in and can produce evidence that will convict him of violation of the game law. . . .

I have the honour to be, sir,

Your obedient servant,

J. H. PETERS, Constable.

"But, sir," stammered the astonished Constable, "it's true—the desertion. I don't know how I come to do it—an' I was mighty ashamed of myself an' disgusted after I done it. But——"

The Superintendent interrupted him with a gesture—"Yes, yes! I know all about it. Morgan reported unofficially by phone from Forty-mile. And I may as well tell you, Peters, that it is at his urgent request that I have allowed you to amend your report—that, and the fact that you were man enough to own up without a hint of excuse for your conduct——"

"But, sir—the kid—he didn't know! He



thought I was straight all the time! It was that more than anything else that made me want to come clean."

The Superintendent smiled grimly: "Don't you think for a minute he didn't know all about you. You see he lay behind a rock and listened to a little conversation you had with Brek Wiley while you were quartering those last three moose."

"Now, what do you think of that!" gasped the astounded Peters, as the full significance of the boy's course dawned upon him.

"He—he's a great kid," he added thoughtfully as he turned toward the door.

"Yes," answered the officer commanding B Division, "he's a great kid, and we're going to miss him around here—a *great kid*. And, by the way, Peters, your enlistment papers are ready—if you want them."

THE END.



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